



CAMELOD

CELTIC EMPIRE 02

LAURIE PENMAN

TYDEII
PROPERTY OF MERTHYR
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter one	7
Chapter two	31
Chapter three	55
Chapter four	70
Chapter five	74
Chapter Six.	109
Chapter seven.	115
Chapter eight	127
Chapter nine	140
Chapter ten	156
Chapter Eleven	164
Chapter Twelve	198
Chapter Thirteen	209
Chapter Fourteen	229
Chapter Fifteen	246
Chapter Sixteen	259
Chapter seventeen	282
Chapter eighteen	300
Chapter nineteen	317
Chapter twenty	345
Historical Note	395

PROPERTY OF MERTHYR TYDFIL
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Introduction

For my own devious purposes I have delayed the assault of the Roman legions on Britain by a year - it was June AD 43 of course -, but this is a 'What if?' story and it might very well have been delayed if Claudius's freedman had not shamed the mutineer legions into boarding.

*The druids did not have a monotheistic religion, but monotheism is a matter of development and they **might** have followed the same path that they appear to be following here.*

To the best of our knowledge neither the Romans nor the British used soap, but it was used in Egypt (and other civilisations) and there are water softening herbs, so I have given Lucius the benefit of a lather when shaving. And why not?

In 33 AD Gregorius Caecilius Cornutos eldest son of a noble Roman family was living in Alexandria in the home of Heron the engineer and scientist. Gregorius had lived in Alexandria under the tutelage of Heron and other Alexandrian philosophers at the insistence of his Egyptian mother since the age of fourteen. It was an education that was very different from what Romans would expect for the son of a patrician family, but his mother, Helen, had a fiery disposition, a belief in the value of Greek education over that of Rome and after a long campaign of argument got her way and Gregorius had been despatched to her old friend Heron. Nine years later the boy had become a young man and an inventive partner to Heron - the latter gained much of his income from the 'toys' and magical effects, such as temple doors that opened and closed with no man's hand upon them, artificial singing birds and automatic dispensers for holy water. It was a comfortable and fascinating life, which was brutally shattered when two friends Lucius and Drusus brought news from Rome that his whole family had been proscribed by Tiberius, its property confiscated and every member that the emperor's agents could lay their hands on, summarily executed. So far as Gregorius knew he was the only surviving member - and not for long if he did not escape Alexandria before the next naval vessel entered the port with Tiberius's agents.

The two friends had travelled in a fast ship belonging to Drusus's father a wealthy ship owner and he had 'borrowed' both cash and jewels at his mother's suggestion and arrived with considerable wealth. In a hurried conference, Gregory, Heron, his two friends and his father's man of business decided that the only place that was outside Tiberius's reach and had no similar tyrants was probably the island of Britain. It was placed on the edge of the civilised world, but was not ruled from Rome - it was decided that Gregorius and his two

friends would take their wealth there and buy land for an estate in the Roman manner. He would also take with him the first fruits of the huge machine (a drop forge operated by steam), that he and Heron had just tested for the first time. The product that they had tools for was forged blanks for sword blades. A few days later Gregorius bid farewell to Heron and they sailed for Britain.

On arrival in south east Britain at the town of Camulodunon, Gregorius eventually obtained a meeting with the ruler of the south eastern Britons, king Cunoval, who was amused by the Roman's belief that he could buy land. "How could a man own the countryside of fields, forests and rivers? They were the creation of Gods, men could merely use them not own them."

For two or three weeks Gregorius waited disconsolately in the British town (more a sprawling settlement of huts, paddocks and the larger round houses of the British nobles), until he was surprised to be called into Cunoval's presence again. Lucius was a legionary officer who had been sponsored by Gregorius's father when he became an orphan, and he had several years experience serving in the provinces. He was a skilled soldier and officer and had spent much of his time in Camulodunon in the company of the warrior nobles, swapping tales of war and demonstrating the effects of a couple of ballista that they had brought with them from Alexandria as part of the equipment for the estate they had hoped to build. The king had taken an interest in this and conceived a scheme to provide himself with a shield against the ambitions of his two sons, Caradoc and Togodumnus. Assassination was an increasing hazard for the king, not an open assassination that would unite his closest nobles in exacting revenge, but a more subtle (both sons were subtle) device, that would not be the clear result of either son's action. He put it to Gregorius and Lucius that if they would swear an oath to avenge his sudden death by any instrument that was clearly not an accident, he would provide them with men and women to build an armed settlement on the northern boundary of his kingdom and there build an effective armed force, using their military skills and machines. It would be a few years before the settlement could be an effective force and he could reveal its purpose to his sons, but he calculated that it would be a worthwhile enterprise. In addition it enabled him to 'sell' settlers and materials to the Romans (upon their arrival he had accepted them as guests, and there was no honorable way in which he could lay his hands on the wealth that he knew they had brought with them).

The fortified camp of Windubro was built on the banks of the Trent with the labour of about two hundred Britons and in the first few weeks of appalling weather it seemed that it would never be completed or worse, the labourers would unite and kill the Roman leaders that Cunoval had placed over them. However it was completed, and slowly began to thrive,

building a population that experienced an ordered township living for the first time and a growing 'army' of disciplined soldiers. Gregorius changed his name to Gregory and as the years passed, introduced water wheels, stirrups, mobile ballista and many other developments that made the town important both militarily and commercially. At the end of 36 AD rumours of invasion by Rome caused Gregory to make a series of visits to the kingdoms to the north of Windubro, seeking alliances. In the course of this he met and married his wife Myrcal. Myrcal was the only surviving child of a Parisi ship owner and merchant living in the major Parisi settlement on the Abos, the huge estuary that took the waters of the Trent, Ouse and Derwent.

With a view to eventually needing to move the population and herds of Windubro down river and into the northern country, Gregory surveyed land on the banks of the Trent, close to the Abos - and began to build the second town, Cantodunon. Three years later the invasion had still not taken place, but both towns were thriving and their joint population was estimated at about seven thousand men and women, with an armed force, organised in a manner similar to the Roman legions, of just over half that figure. The Two Towns possessed an army of citizen soldiers, many of whom were committed fulltime to the legion's business and which, in many ways, resembled the army of the early Roman republic. Armed with mobile ballistas, stirrups cavalry and light cavalry consisting of youths armed with steel crossbows and riding British ponies, the legions were a formidable force and there was no army in Britain that could withstand them. Their discipline and battlefield tactics were comparable to Rome's legions.

'Two Towns' was a clumsy name for what was now a sizeable and (in British terms), a powerful state and as the result of a prophet called simply 'The Man' and his visions of an old prophesy, the name was changed to Camelod. An environment that encouraged invention from men and women of all levels in the society, built a burgeoning economy that exported iron and steel goods across the Roman empire, machine cut board, pottery and metalware stamped by machinery too. Both agriculture and industry were totally free of slavery, the founder of Camelod, Gregory, considered slaves to be dirty, untrustworthy and uneconomic. Certainly the last was shown to be true - given the development of watermills and simple steam engines based on Heron's Alexandrian experiments.

Camelod's legions were superior to the armies of the Catuvellauni and the Brigante, the most warlike of the Britons, but their numbers could do unavoidable damage to Camelod's commerce, merely by their presence. There was a constant awareness of the possibility of a concerted attack by the federated tribes of the Brigante, or the subject nations of the Catuvellauni.

Chapter one

Mid June AD 39, Windubro

Two hours before sunrise the alarm call of the tuba shrilled from the watch tower that overlooked the town on the banks of the Trent. A succession of three long drawn out notes with a long pause between, although there was little need for more than those first three blasts, for the guard on the walls changed every hour, giving each man two hours between watches. It was an efficient system and one that almost guaranteed that no man slept and earned a lashing.

The alarm was answered by the town's cornicen and the tower fell silent once more while the walls of Windubro boiled with men and officers organising the defences. Whilst a squad of twenty doubly rationed men were dispatched to reinforce the watch tower guard, the legionaries were forming up in their centuries on the parade ground before the Principia. Centurions met at the war room, while their optios (a recognised rank in the Windubron legion) directed the men on parade, calling up rations and arms, horses and ballistas.

At this time there was only a small legionary force in the town, four centuries of infantry, one squadron of cavalry and two batteries of horse drawn ballistas. Certainly enough to defend against a siege, but dangerously weak if anything more was needed - and much of Windubro's wealth lay in its workshops, saw mills, corn mills and water powered foundries and forges - almost all lying outside the town walls. Within half an hour the troops were marched off to their stations, cavalry and artillery inside the western gate with a century of infantry, and the rest to the walls and the big ballistas capable of throwing hundred pound weights of stone five hundred paces. There was little more for them to do for the moment. The meeting in the war room was short, with no information except the warning of danger, there was no planning to be carried through, simply a quick check that each officer knew his present responsibility and that no critical shortages other than the depleted garrison, existed.

After five minutes Caionac centurion of the First and temporary primus, dismissed his officers and prepared to meet the Town Council. The civilian citizens of Windubro below the age of forty formed the Town Guard, both men and women. Ever since the early days of the town when the population had been small and the legion itself could barely raise five hundred trained men, the Town Guard had trained twice a month, the men with hand weapons and the women manning the missile weapons. Over a thousand civilians were capable of manning the walls - there was no danger at all of any British horde breaking in. The problem would be protecting the valuable mills and manufactories outside the walls -

that was the legion's responsibility and they waited anxiously for more news from the tower - or daylight so that the nature of the threat could be measured.

Down by the docks, six fast skiffs were already manned and setting off one by one down river - insurance against the rest of the signal network having been neutralised by the unknown enemy. Fire signals to the towers to the north had been made and answered, but not only was there no certainty that the chain to Cantodunon was unbroken, the information carried by night time signals was far too limited. The skiffs with four men rowing each and four resting would take ten hours to reach the twin town and warnings would be shouted to each settlement they passed. For the time being all that could be done was done.

Another change of guard had taken place and the clepsydra in the Principia indicated about one hour to first light when a glow threw the top of the watch tower into profile and then a fiery streak arced up and down to erupt in a blaze of flames and sparks in the south western meadows. The caged ball of straw and other materials that Heron had concocted gave enough light for the Windubrons to see that a host of Britons, thrown into temporary confusion and terror by the fire, was advancing towards the walls. Shouted instructions from the Guard optio gave the range indicated by the illuminated stone marker nearest the invaders and men and women whose normal tasks were purely agricultural busily adjusted the six large ballista spaced along that wall. At a distance of five hundred yards, the Britons were well within lethal range of both stones and the four foot long, iron tipped bolts being ranged at them.

A streak of fire from the guard tower and a burst of light a hundred yards to the south of the first revealed a mob of warriors streaming forward to encircle the town. The Britons had absorbed the shock of the first flare and this second one did nothing to deter their advance, but within seconds of it landing the ballistas discharged and tore apart the crowd to the south-west. It was totally unexpected, warriors with experience of spears and slings had no conception of the damage that heavy weapons could wreak, nor the distance that they could operate so murderously over. The centre of the crowd boiled with bodies that were thrown around like straw men and the leaping, screaming survivors of that assault. Below the battlements teams of ten men and women heaved at the pulley system that Heron had rigged for recharging each catapult. With so many hands at the ropes - and all of them perfectly secure from any enemy weapon - the ballista were loaded with a fresh cargo of split river stones and bolts within a count of two hundred from the first shot - and during that time the ballistas on the south eastern wall had caused an equal amount of damage.

The third discharge sent the terrified army surging away from the site of the slaughter, leaving an horrific melange of dead and wounded behind them. The fires were still bright enough to reveal the horror to the Windubrons and they had not the heart to release another hail of shot at the Britons. It was the first taste of warfare for most of the guard and for all of them it was their first view of the havoc the town weapons could create; even at five hundred yards the spread of torn bodies was a ghastly sight.

Cainoc stood down the major part of the guard, leaving the walls to the normal number of watchmen. The legion however, rested just within the gatehouse, ready for whatever daylight revealed - there was no sense whatever in making any sort of scouting or retaliatory sortie. A major part of the enemy had been severely damaged, but, at a guess, it could not be more than a hundred or so and who knew what was the size of this invasion?

The civilians slowly dispersed to their huts, jubilant, but still subdued by their success. Any Roman observer would have noticed at least two remarkable things about the population, the first and most obvious was that there was an enormous preponderance of men and women under the age of twenty five. This would have been particularly startling if they had the chance to see the town when its full complement of military personnel were present for the oldest officer in Windubro's legion was twenty four and the average age was about twenty. The average age of civilians was higher for there were many Celtic craftsmen and men and women who had been petty chiefs in local tribes, but even there, the majority were exceedingly young.

The other surprising thing was that there were no slaves, the Windubron army enslaved captives from their many brushes with surrounding tribes, but they sold them in Gaul, not one was kept within either of the towns or the settlements. It was a matter of Gregory's personal feelings about slaves, he did not trust them, he believed that enslaved human beings were lower than animals and above all the system had a very bad effect on an economy that was as young and vibrant as Windubro's.

When Cunobal transferred just over two hundred of his people to the lordship of Gregory and Lucius so that they could create their armed settlement to his north, he made quite certain that it in no way depleted his own army of seasoned warriors nor 'stole' valued craftsmen. The Romans managed to persuade him to supply one smith and two trainees (claimed by the king to be a total of three smiths), but that was the most he would do. Since that time Windubro had acquired many excellent craftsmen attracted by the success of the town's army and the growth of its commerce. Lucius's opinion of Celtic warriors as being heroic and totally useless as soldiers had matched Cunobal's determination not to let any of his experienced warriors move to Windubro. It was Lucius's firmly held belief that

almost any Briton over the age of eighteen was too thoroughly imbued with the heroic idea of warfare and too certain of his own prowess for him to fully accept proper discipline and training. Over the years he had proved that their youngsters took to the Roman way of fighting with very little difficulty, they found themselves thrashing armies composed of men with fiercely won reputations, they adapted to the new ideas that Gregory produced of light mobile artillery and heavy cavalry with stirrups and lances and, most important of all, their loyalty to Windubro was untainted by any lingering loyalty to the tribes of their boyhood.

The state that was growing in the British midlands possessed an army of some six thousand men which included nearly three thousand infantry, two and a half thousand cavalry and one hundred and eighty mobile ballista capable of high speed manoeuvres. In addition there was a large signal corp, medical section, clerks and craftsmen - for the legion had its own water powered forges, sawmills and bronze foundries. The civilian population also produced cut board, iron tools, flour, hides, wool and a whole range of manufactured goods that was being extended every year either by development of new skills or by the importation of foreign workers. It was the only state in Britain with Roman hygiene, the only one whose population owned coin and traded on its own behalf and the two towns of Windubro and Cantodunon were a magnet for traders from all over the country, but a far greater number from Gaul and the land north of the Rhine. In this year of 39 AD it was at a crossroads, commerce was growing quickly, wealth poured in, but its legion had not yet proved that it could prevent this wealth from bleeding away in a succession of raids from envious and more numerous neighbours. The present raid upon the town was a warning that they were in danger of attracting more acquisitive attention than they could deal with.

Daylight gradually revealed the progress of the invasion. For the time being it occupied the woods and meadows along the right bank of the Trent and no attempt was being made to reach the bridge that spanned the river a hundred yards upstream of Windubro. The fields of young corn, beans, peas and oats (Windubro normally paddocked over one thousand horses for ballista and cavalry) lay on the other side of the rough, white water at the confluence of the Trent and Dove.

Downstream were the garrison's horses, a mere two hundred in a small paddock, and the town flocks of sheep which roamed the open land up to the northern woods. This open area which lay fallow this year covered almost two square miles and consisted of ground cleared by the growing logging and board cutting industry. It closed down to a neck about seven hundred yards wide immediately south of the town. Dead bodies littered the nearer

and smoother ground, though not as many as lay in the meadows that had received two volleys.

Caionac, with the seven centurions and the seven optios of the garrison centuries, stood on the ramparts studying what could be seen of the horde to the south-west. There was nothing cowed about the mass of strutting warriors that gathered around cooking fires or waved weapons threateningly at the defenders - even at almost half a mile to the main body the temper of the army was plain. Just as soon as they found a way to neutralise the effect of the ballistas they would be back or - and this was the main worry - take their revenge on the crops and installations along the river. The water was unpleasant to cross, but by no means impossible in this dry month of June.

The primus scowled at the seething mob, "Anybody care to bet on how long it takes them to attack us in widely spaced columns?"

The oldest man there was Cano, optio of cavalry, a twenty six year old who had been barely acceptable when he applied for citizenship three years before. Only his expert handling of horse and lance had defeated Lucius's bias against adult warriors. "They're mainly Brigante, you'd find a chieftain for every score of warriors - there's no way that they would permit themselves to be organised into columns. They all want to be at the front showing off their weapons and the gold they won in battle."

His words brought a moment's silence to the general murmur of discussion. The local tribes were not wealthy in the torcs and jewellery that announced a warrior's success in battle. Now that they thought to look they could see the flash of precious metal and enamels - it had been a couple of years since the legion had won any large amount of booty ... and the main body of the legion could not arrive for two or three days yet; their personal shares would be large. There was no doubt that that brief comment totally changed the direction that their plans took from that moment.

"They don't seem anxious to get any closer, primus. Can the wall ballista reach them over there?" Bodu was a clear faced youth, with a mop of dark curls that never stayed inside his regulation helmet, made an optio of infantry just three months before, he had had little time to get used to talking freely to officers.

Cainoc turned to look at the centurion of the town guard who was responsible for the weapons, the question was answered promptly, "Barely, barely. We could skip bolts along the hard ground there to the left of the last years wheat field, but I'd guess that most would hit a tussock or something and veer off or turn end for end and be useless." The man

frowned, his rank was substantive, but Cullum was not a legionary - in fact at twenty seven he felt middle aged amongst this flock of youngsters, he had never been considered as legionary material, but he was a useful warrior nevertheless. There were many like him in the town, many much older and it was a constant source of annoyance to them that boys should be preferred over themselves for admission to the legion. Still, the advantages of citizenship, both in comfort and silver coin made it easy to push the thought to the back of their minds and Cullum had the additional comfort of holding a senior rank in the town guard. His word on the expertise of his guardsmen and their huge weapons was accepted without demur.

"We could persuade them to come closer." Bodu again and the conversation became generally fixed on that single subject. They were all certain that the Britons had recovered the important men amongst the pile of casualties lying in the fields - and, what was worse, scavenged the torcs and other valuables from the remaining corpses.

"Decoys? Who's going to play decoy then? Me?" A burly optio of infantry shook his head, bare now as the sun rose higher and the June weather asserted itself. He laughed boisterously, "Forget it boyo. I'd like to keep my guts right here thank you." and he slapped his right hand down on the broad, armoured belt over his belly. The younger man looked shamefaced, but the subject was pushed forward again immediately by Cullum, "A couple of centuries out there about two hundred yards would be well within the protection of the ballista."

Caionac rested one foot on the platform of the nearest of the machines, "What have you in mind Cullum?"

"The infantry centuries march out there," He pointed out to where a large number of the British killed in the two volleys from the south western ramparts still lay, "and start carting them back here."

"That's a lot further than two hundred yards - nearer twice that, any shots from here would land dangerously close to them .. if not actually in their ranks."

The point was acknowledge with an uplifted hand, "Ah yes ... if the centuries drew up their ranks there, but if they lined up just this side by a hundred yards or so .. supporting the carts. It would seem logical and the British would believe that they were covered from our ballista by the two centuries."

"Well they would be."

"We have the mobile ballistas - they've never seen those - and heavy cavalry - they've never seen them either. I've seen them though and I've seen that two-man attack, where one man rides the horse and another runs along at the side holding onto the saddle and making twice the speed he'd make running alone." Cullum, leaned back as he finished presenting his plan and looked around at the other officers for approval. It wasn't slow in coming from the young optios and centurions, "You reckon they would charge across at the centuries and carts, thinking they were safe from the ballistas?"

"And then the cavalry would whisk the infantry up and back behind the mobiles?"

"What about their shields, they'd be in the way."

"Drop them. And the carts, we can pick them up later," Cullum could see no problem to his scheme.

Cainoc was doubtful still and turned to his cavalry centurion, "What about it Piso, Cano? Can your men carry a man at each stirrup?"

Piso was a slight man whose leathery features could have been any age, he was one of the few in Windubro to sport a long Celtic moustache, "We've done it often enough with one, but it is true, the shields would be a nuisance. Normally the cavalry man holds it on the opposite side to the foot soldier while he bounds along with him. There's no way he could hold two shields. " There was a pause as he envisioned the manoeuvre, "Anyway the other infantry man would be on the other side ... it's impossible."

"So they'd have to leave the shields?"

"No other way, but the horses could support two men grasping the saddle for a hundred yards or so."

The primus nodded, "That'd be enough."

"And there's the remounts, we have a hundred of those and there must be fifty lads in the town who can ride well enough."

The planning took place right there on the ramparts of the town with the intended victims of the decoy action still massed almost half a mile away against the further boundary of fields and forest. Cainoc summed it up after about ten minutes, "Three centuries, the fifth,

sixth and eleventh will march out into the field, fifth on the left, eleventh on the right. Four ranks and a linked front; the fourth stays in reserve just outside the south western gatehouse."

The four centurions and their optios nodded, although Tazak of the fourth infantry looked crestfallen to have been designated the reserve. "March four hundred paces, that takes you right up to the heap of bodies out there. Take up a defensive stance with shields in testudo against a missile attack and hold it while the carters begin to load up the dead." The primus swung around to address the two cavalry centurions, "Tascat and Huw will walk their men, dismounted, a hundred yards behind the infantry, that should leave the British unaware that we have cavalry on the field - and a hundred yards behind them will be the mobile ballista, ready to deploy rapidly to the south so that they can rake any move to flank the town or make a flank attack as the Britons charge our line."

He paused and surveyed the whole group ringed about him, "Are we agreed so far?" "Right. The Britons attack - we hope they attack - and the infantry will wait until they are within a couple of hundred paces of their front, start a slow retreat and then break in assumed panic back to the cavalry lines." One fist pummelled his palm as he emphasised his next point, "The foot soldiers must not 'panic' too soon. You must remain close enough so that the two hundred yards gradually narrows down to one hundred and the Britons can feel that they are protected from the town ballista. They'll be committed to their charge by the time infantry and cavalry come together, you know how they are once they've got blood in their eyes and an enemy almost within reach. They'll keep coming - even after the mixed force widens the gap between them.

"Now, this is an important point; we have two squadrons or centuries of heavy cavalry, one hundred and sixty men, fifty boys riding remounts and three hundred and twenty legionaries to move. Those boys have never practised the rider and foot soldier mode of attack, but there is not far to go and it seems that they should be able to manage with a single legionary holding the saddle and bounding along beside. That leaves two hundred and seventy legionaries to run with one hundred and sixty cavalymen, more than one hundred will have to double up - and to do that they must discard their shields.

"The double loads go first, with the boys and their legionaries - sixty men will retain their shields and adopt the normal practice. They will take the rear and when within fifty paces of our walls, drop off and form a shield wall whilst the others draw up behind them in ranks. We will attempt to distribute shields from a store outside the gatehouse, but it will be tricky. However, by that time the town ballista will have opened up on the main army and the mobiles will be harrying their right flank ... there should be no trouble in forming a

proper front with all four centuries. When the cavalry have reformed and collected their lances they will outflank on the same side as the mobiles, supporting them and sweeping in to cut off groups of Britons from the main party."

He grinned around at them, "By then it will be over, attacked from the front by the town and from the right by mobile ballista and cavalry, we will simply roll them back to the forest and ride down the scattered parties that remain in the fields."

"How many are there d'you think, primus?" Bodu sounded a little uncertain now that he heard the plan in its entirety, he did not like the sound of going out so far from the safety of the town walls.

"Hmm?" His commanding officer looked surprised that the question had been asked, "A few thousand I expect, but what does it matter? They are not equipped to get into the town, they won't get closer than a hundred paces to the infantry and we'll have the south eastern gatehouse guarded and open so that your cavalry and the mobiles can re-enter that way if they approach the town. It's safe enough, just a show of force to encourage them within range again and then we'll have a fine harvest of booty for a quarter of an hour's work."

He nodded confidently, "You'll see lads, the legion can deal with a few thousand savages - and the signal stations will bring a large force down from Cantodunon in the next forty eight hours; then we'll wipe the floor with them."

General approval greeted his words and as soon as they were dismissed his officers rapidly dispersed, most to the gatehouse, some to the stables where remounts were kept.

It was not long before all was ready and the great doors of the gatehouse opened outwards. Caionac stood on the gatehouse rampart and watched as the four centuries marched out in column and then neatly and with practised ease three of them formed into line abreast in ranks six deep on the march. The fourth century marched to the right of the gate and then halted with pilum and shields grounded waiting for the others to finish their advance to the killing ground a quarter of a mile away. While they were only half way to their objective the cavalry quietly followed, each man leading his horse so that they were hidden from the view of the British. A single century of twenty four mobile ballista came last. It was certain that the Britons half a mile away could see no more of them than the Windubrons could see of the Britons, but even when the distance was down to half that Caionac was confident that both cavalry and ballistas would be a complete surprise.

He looked along this south western wall, there were nine of the huge engines mounted there now and another nine along the south eastern wall, the additional weapons stripped from the north eastern side. Civilians of the town guard were already tailed onto the ropes that would bend the horizontal throwing arms. It was a much quicker method than the windlass operated by four men that was common in Roman forts, but it took up more space. These weapons could discharge their lethal loads every minute for twenty discharges or so - then the powerful wound springs of horsehair rope were likely to break if they were not let right down and regreased. Heron was looking into a method of encapsulating the springs in copper tubes and changing them over every twenty shots, but that was for the future, right now Caionac had a total discharge of at least one hundred and eighty stones, bags of chipped stones or the iron tipped bolts that reached further and skipped along at the end of their flight, piercing, tumbling and smashing into their targets. All he wanted now was to get the Britons well within range.

Not long now, the carts had been dispatched and were now overtaking the marching men so that they could be seen to be taking up bodies before the legionaries reached them and then formed a screen between them and the barbarians. The mass of men against the forest boundary were a dark fluid that swelled towards them and then swayed from side to side with only the occasional isolated figure that could be identified as human by its four tiny limbs and solid centre. Flashes of sunlight reflected from torcs and other personal jewellery. Caionac wondered what they thought as they watched his men march steadily towards them. He shrugged his shoulders and laughed quietly to himself, Did it matter? Huge numbers of them would be dead soon and then when the Windubrons charged after the demoralised remainder Ah yes, a tremendous victory for the small garrison and a rich share of booty. Everyone would benefit of course, civilian and legion, but the five hundred or so men who took part in the battle would win a lion's share.

"Lion's share?" He mused, Lord Lucius said that quite often. What was a Lion?

The carts were loading (they could all be abandoned when the time came to pull back), the infantry moved through them and took up station as a huge roar of anger burst from the Britons. The mass of men moved nearer and then did something curious. The primus watched as the centre seemed to become arms that reached forward and outwards leaving a blank space in the middle of the host.

"What?"

Something glittered in the edge of the forest, it moved onto the field swiftly like a stream of mixed black and white.

"Lugh No! No, No. Oh Hell! Chariots."

The horrified Caionac stood frozen for a moment as he watched a string of chariots debouch onto the meadow land and begin to form up. His whole strategy was destroyed, those chariots would be into his lines before a slow count of twenty.

"Sound the retreat!" He glared at the stunned cornicen at his side, "Quickly man, for the Gods' sake quickly."

The rapid notes rang out and the primus was relieved to see an instant response from the legionaries, but would it be fast enough? The stream of swiftly moving objects that he had instinctively recognised as chariots had grouped themselves into two columns and began their advance at a slow trot. All three centuries had turned their backs and were marching to the rear and the waiting cavalry, carts were abandoned and as yet none of the soldiers were aware of the danger. Another fifty yards before the legionaries could grasp a stirrup and begin the fast leaping stride they had practised so often -, but this time more than two thirds of them would be two to a horse - and shieldless. Caionac bit his lip there was no signal to tell them to abandon the plan and keep their shields, nor to determine which were to join with the cavalry and which were not.

"Sound the 'Alarm, enemy in sight'." It was a nonsensical order under the present conditions, but maybe it would awake the centurions or optios to the imminent danger, for the chariots had speeded up to the gallop and closed the gap to the retreating men to three hundred yards. Caionac beat his hands on the rampart and waited for the outcome, it was to be a half hour that he would never forget during a long life of campaigning in Britain - and one that would visit him in nightmare throughout his life.

At the sound of the retreat Bodu's century had mounted and walked their horses towards the legionary lines. The elevated position gave them a sight over the heads of the legionaries and the chariots were immediately recognised.

"Gods, where did they come from? " Bodu knew chariots, his father was a famous charioteer in the Iceni. He veered over towards his centurion.

"Huw." he bellowed, "Chariots - they'll be in amongst us before we've got the infantry halfway back to the town."

"Pass the word - one man only and all legionaries to keep their shields, I'm sending a messenger to the fifth. Pick up your legionaries fast and make best time back to the gate."

Bodu watched for a couple of seconds as a man galloped the few yards to the line of retreating men, all in proper order with shields over their backs, but woefully ignorant of what was happening two hundred yards away.

Caroc was centurion of the fifth and in command of the grouped centuries, he gazed up in amazement at the red-faced cavalryman bawling down at him, "Chariots? Where?"

"Behind you man, behind you."

Caroc looked back, the dust of their retreat was already settling and the foam flecked heads of the horses, the bouncing chariots and above all the exultant faces of the spearmen in the woven withy vehicles made everything terribly clear. His cornuten was at his side and so far there was no panic in the ranks. Sound "Last two ranks halt.... About face..... Form columns of four."

The troops had practised tactics against chariot charges, but never under these circumstances - and only in exercise. The men drew to a ragged halt and turned round to gape for a second or two at the totally unexpected danger that was bearing down on them. Eighty men in two ranks shuffled in minor disorder and became two ragged columns of four just in time to greet the chariots. It was a creditable performance, the first flight of pilum was discharged progressively as most of the chariot horses automatically took the path left open for them and passed between the columns, three, four, and then six of the flimsy vehicles crashed and spewed their spearmen between the columns, but then chariots from the rear hammered into the flanks of the columns and the century began to collapse.

A small disorganised battle took place between the crumbling, but reforming columns and the chariots, brought to a trot by the damaged leaders and wheeling around in amongst the legionaries wreaking havoc, but never quite breaking free in an organised group.

The remaining four ranks, alerted by the trumpet calls had retained their shields, half of them had made their rendezvous with the cavalrymen and were leaping away across the field towards the gatehouse. Cavalry optios were acting as scouts and keeping their centurion informed of the battle. The main body of Britons had followed in the wake of the chariots and were only two hundred yards away. As the remains of the century gathered into a square urged by the two optios remaining, the chariots in their turn assumed their

battle columns and rode down at the rear of the retreating legionaries and cavalry; they had not the speed of the original charge, but it would not take long before they were into the backs of the Windubrons.

Caroc stood still and scanned the disorganised field, he felt curiously calm, detached. There was blood running down his right arm, he could feel its tickling progress to the hand that grasped his sword, but there was no pain. The remains of the two ranks were gathered about him, shields overlapping and beginning to settle back into line again. There were less than thirty. For the time being they were free of attack, but the main body of Britons were drawing closer every second - there was only one way they could go.

"Shields on your backs lads, and leg it for the Gatehouse." The fact that there was another battle developing between them and the gate, with more than two score of chariots hammering at the rear rank of the fleeing centuries was no discouragement, the men lined up on the trot and hurried towards the town. In front of them the ranks had dismounted from their cavalry transport, the leaders forming up with spaces to let their comrades through, the cavalry riding off to form their squadron. The manoeuvre, if such an improvised situation could be called that, suddenly became significant as a hail of light shot from three batteries of mobiles peppered the chariot horses, they were bolts designed to madden horses and bounce off legionary shields and armour - most of the time. The British chariots were thrown into total confusion as terrified horses galloped, but not disabled veered away from the continuing hail of shots. The mobiles were using a quarter draw on their ballistas, it only gave a hundred yard range with light shot, but a single quarter movement of the windlasses was all it took and the men could make a discharge every count of ten.

The disordered chariots lost touch with the legionaries and proper lines were drawn up in time to welcome Caroc and his thirty survivors. The batteries of mobiles were linked to their horses and galloped off out of sight of the legionaries. The feeling of detachment, with complete clarity of thought still gripped him. Caroc could see that there were no centurions apart from himself, they seemed to have about half the strength they had started out with and the Gatehouse was still between two hundred and three hundred paces away. He glanced back at the Britons, they were slowing down after their quarter mile charge.

"Right! Sound 'About turn', 'Trot in ranks!'" For some reason he was not surprised when some one hundred men wheeled about, slung their shields over their backs and began a controlled retreat towards the town. Behind them the Britons gained slightly, but the infantry had had a brief pause to catch their breath and now the trot was just sufficiently

fast to serve its purpose without rendering them breathless. Whatever he did, Caroc knew he must not press them hard or when the time came to stop and face the charge there would be no control at all.

They covered fifty yards; another fifty and only seventy at the most separated them from their pursuers, and then there was the most terrifying noise overhead as the full discharge from the rampart batteries unleashed a ton and a half of stones and four huge bolts at maximum range. Caroc could not see over the nearest mob of warriors, but the crash as the volley smashed down almost five hundred yards away from the centuries, was heard quite plainly and the screams of scores of injured and dying men, very obviously checked the oncoming horde.

Caroc and the optios chivvied their men into tighter order, shields almost touching, sword blades held ready in the narrow gaps. A few pilum had been found from somewhere and he could hear the reserve century, falling in at the rear and passing more ammunition forward. He began to feel comfortable again, the detachment fell away and he gratefully accepted the security of a stable legionary line. Another volley ripped overhead and he noticed that every man ducked involuntarily - he had done it himself. In the forefront of the British host a huge man with an axe suddenly decided that it was safer to charge than to move in any other direction and urged on by the sounds of the devastation behind them the Britons ran at the line.

There were a brief few moments of danger as the axe crashed through a shield, felling the man behind it and legionaries on either side spilled away from the raging giant. Caroc saw panic begin before a deftly flung pilum pierced the huge chest and the line drew raggedly together and then solidified. He remembered Lord Lucius's words on the difference between experienced and inexperienced soldiers, "A Roman legionary knows the man to left and right in the line, he's fought with them, drunk with them, brawled against them and he knows he can trust the man on his right to guard his sword arm while he does the same for the man on his left. Years of campaigning teach a man trust - and a Roman line can break, but it mends itself almost instantly because the men rely totally on one another."

They may not be as experienced as a legionary with ten years in the line, but he could see a lot more than just a hint of that solid professionalism in the men around him. There was no time for all that though, the attacks on the shield wall were frantic and continuous. The swords licked out and warriors fell or pulled back into the crowd and others took their places - and all the time the bombardment carried on - the crashing of the impact getting louder as the range was pulled back.

Suddenly he saw terrified men behind the front rank of Britons, men were running from the rear and crashing into the fighting ranks. No sooner had he seen the start of the confusion than the men in front of them turned and ran back and sideways to escape the swords and the not so distant barrage. In less than a minute Caroc could only see fleeing groups of warriors harried by mobiles and heavy cavalry - all taking care not to run into the killing ground cultivated by the town ballistas.

There was time to look about him and assess the damage. It was difficult to make a head count, the line was battered, far from straight and no-one was in his correct position. He recognised an optio from the fourth and realised that the reserve had filtered through the harried ranks of the centuries that had fled the Britons assault. He should be gathering his own men together - and those of the centuries that appeared to have no officers - and order them in ranks, but without some idea of the numbers left, what orders should he tell the cornicen to sound?

Caroc's eye was caught by the distant mobiles and cavalry, making a wide curve around the killing ground and making repeated charges at the fringes of what was clearly an enormous body of men. They might have had the enthusiasm knocked out of them for the moment, but now that they were gathered into the host again, beyond the reach of the ballista, the swooping attacks by mobile ballistas and horsemen were an annoyance only and the chariots were still in evidence - it only needed some warrior to bring them into order again and the both arms would be at risk. The tubas and cornu sounded as he turned back to begin the task of counting the remainder of the infantry. His own cornicen summoned the fifth, sixth and eleventh and, abruptly the mangled line of men sitting, leaning on shields or even lying down were on their feet and discovering their own units. It was hardly brisk, the battle had been short, but exhausting and a psychological shock, but it was positive, slowly producing an order with the legionaries in approximately the right positions.

Men looked to both sides as the shuffling proceeded, waiting for familiar faces to appear on the left or right flank. The gaps were huge, spaces left for expected comrades closed as the legionaries filled them with new line mates and the lines shrank. From the far right the centurion of the fourth, the only one left on his feet, marched to face his command. Of four centuries of eighty men plus officers, about one hundred and forty were standing. Caroc stared at the centurion, it was Tazak, a bloody gash across his cheek and his helmet lopsided on his head now the cheek guard was gone.

"Gods, you were lucky, centurion!"

The man rubbed the blood that still dripped over his chin and then grinned, "We're all lucky. I thought for a time that they were going to wipe us over the outside of the town wall." He sniffed and the back of his hand wiped another smear of blood horizontally across his lip. "Anyway here we stand and there they lie."

His gesture was wide, covering the fallen bodies of Britons and Windubrons alike. "They're not going to come any closer today are they? Get the carts organised again to pick up our wounded and dead - and then we harvest our winnings eh!"

Caroc had lost sight of the reason for their reckless adventure, there must have been hundreds of dead Britons and it was the most famous warriors who had pressed closest to the legionaries. Fame showed itself in the personal adornments in gold and enamel. He snapped off a salute that was remarkably smart under the circumstances. "Yes centurion."

The gatehouse was opened and the uniformed part of the civilian garrison amounting to five hundred men with carts and oxen, surged out to greet the battered centuries and then moved out to recover Windubron casualties and the spoils of the battle. It was afternoon before the stream of men, women and carts through the gates was halted. All the dead and badly wounded had been recovered. One hundred and seventy five infantry dead, twenty two wounded and likely to live; two complete batteries, six mobile ballista, had been smashed and the eighteen men slaughtered - there were no wounded left by the Britons who had suffered greatly from the attacks of the swift, deadly machines. The cavalry had lost one hundred men and horses, but none of the youngsters on the remounts; Caionac had recalled them in time to avoid becoming caught up in the battle. Very nearly three hundred men had died in the fallow wheat fields. Two centurions were dead, Piso and Dugal of the eleventh and sixth infantry respectively, and twelve optios.

The primus dreaded reporting to Lord Lucius when the relief force arrived. He realised now what a stupid thing he had done, urged on by greed for gold and glory and made complacent by his contempt for British warriors. The chariots had made the difference of course, but that was no excuse, he should have allowed for the possibility. Better still he should have kept his little army and the citizens within the safety of the town wall; there was nothing the Britons could have done against them. On the positive side they had prevented the enemy from reaching the bridge and crossing over to the wheat crops and oats on the left bank -, but they could have done that just as efficiently using the wall ballistas alone.

He had met the returning men and used the town guard to transport the wounded to the hospital - the dead to a empty warehouse on the northern side of the town, there was a

cool breeze off the river there - and the fit to the legion kitchens. All centuries were under orders to parade at the west gate in three hours time. Meanwhile the walls were fully manned - it that was the term when half the personnel were women - the huge ballista sat ready for charging and regular reports were being received from the signal tower overlooking the town. There was nothing more Caionac could do except dictate his report to one of the Principia's clerks and keep a watch on the Britons. By late afternoon and with another three hours to go before dusk, the primus was down at the gatehouse, viewing the depleted infantry centuries and combining them into two centuries of about sixty men each - that included some wounded. The cavalry made an undersized century of about the same size and the mobile ballistas had only been one century to begin with - they mustered eighteen machines. Arranging temporary officers to replace the dead took very little time, having those officers rank their men in their lines with old mates taking up familiar positions took longer. The men were tired, depressed, but unless the time was taken now to make sure that every man knew and recognised the one on either flank, the legionaries would not be able to fight effectively - or at least confidently.

Secretly Caionac doubted if the hodge podge they had cobbled together could be considered in any way effective at the moment, but they had to do their best, there was no knowing what tomorrow would bring. Signals from the tower had shown no ambitions on the part of the British army and now the smoke of cooking fires could be seen clearly rising over the background darkness of the forest. After one more dismissal followed by 'Assemble' Caionac decided that enough was enough and the legionaries went off to their individual quarters in the town. The town guard took full responsibility for security under Cullum and his optios - the night passed quietly, and much to his surprise Caionac slept through to sunrise.

The feeling of despondency had not evaporated overnight however and it took a distinct effort to break fast on his usual watered wine, flat bread and salted lard. It was even more of an effort to appear on the parade ground for assigning morning duties and supervising half an hour of vigorous exercise. The grin on his face felt stiff, unreal, but it seemed to hide his feelings adequately and the men went off to the mornings duties - not that there were many within the town. The staff meeting at the Principia's war room was almost as quickly done with as the one immediately before yesterday's expedition, there were only four centurions now and two of them temporary rank and the centurion of the town guard. As soon as the present duties had been executed, half the infantry, cavalry and ballista were to parade for three hours at a time at the west gatehouse, the rest were on make do and mend - and there was plenty to do in that department. The meeting was gloomy until the end when Caionac announced the haul from the British dead.

"The Principia clerks have weighed the trophies," He felt a lift in his spirits as he said it, despite his feelings of guilt and failure, "and it is surprising. We stripped seven hundred bodies of arms and ornaments, most of them high quality for the chieftains led that charge." Savouring a few moments delay he smiled at them all and then announced, "I don't know where they came from, but these warriors have access to a great deal of gold and silver - we have weighed five hundred pounds of gold and two hundred of silver ... then there are weapons and enamel ornaments. The metal is equivalent to thirty thousand gold aurei - three million sesterces!

"Give your men the news, but .." Caionac grew sombre again, "remind them we have one hundred and ninety new widows to comfort and pension. There's to be no celebration until after we can bury our dead honourably and speed their ghosts from the place."

At midday, almost immediately after the men had started their meal the watch tower tuba shrilled its warning again, it was followed closely by the deeper call of the cornu from the battlements where the sight of a mass of men streaming out of the four major paths in the distant forest set the guard to gathering personal weapons and straining back the arms of the ballista. Caionac ran full pelt up the steps to the fighting platform and almost knocked Cullom into the roadway inside the wall.

"Well," he demanded with a brief wave of his hand in apology, "what d'you make of it?"

"Dammit primus, I can't see any more than you. Something's stirred them up, look!" One beheringed hand gestured across the fields to a black flood of barely discernible warriors, a couple of chariots out in the front were clear enough to see. Caionac turned to stare up at the watch tower and the vertical semaphore poles, they were being moved, the four smaller ones taking up a series of rapidly changing patterns on either side. The shorter poles were mounted on swinging spars nowadays, making it easier to change their position from left to right of the central marker pole - it took up a greater width, but the speed was four or five times what it had been.

"Get two men to the signal office and bring me the information sentence by sentence, I'm not waiting for some signals clerk to get it all down neatly on wax - get it to me piecemeal."

Pacing back and forth, Caionac watched the activity inside the gate draw to an abrupt finish as the last men fell into line and stood at ease. The first man leapt up the steps and gasped out his news, "The legion is behind the Britons."

"How much of the legion, man?"

"All of it sir. Lord Lucius too."

"What the Hell is the whole legion doing this far from Cantodunon," Cantodunon was the second town and just over one hundred miles away.

"I don't know sir."

And Lord Lucius too, Caionac thought, his interview was closer than he'd thought.

"Time to go lads," Turning to the cornicen he said, "Sound 'deploy'."

The signals for the day had already been decided at the morning meeting, but he had not dreamt that they would really be used until tomorrow, 'deploy' in this instance opened the gate and the whole force of infantry, cavalry and ballista marched outside.

As Caionac rapidly descended the steps to speak to his small force, the second man from signals arrived with the last part of the message. The primus listened, nodding as the stream of words poured forth, it was much what he expected hear given the news that Lord Lucius had a force of five thousand at the back of the Britons.

One century of infantry and four ballista were dispatched to the opposite side of the bridge to prevent the Britons getting into the crops and the rest, infantry, cavalry and mobile ballista trotted off to take a position level with the east wall and clear of the field of fire of the huge machines on the south wall. They took a position that reflected in miniature the classic legion battle formation, infantry in a block with cavalry in two wings, but they also had mobile artillery on each flank - seven ballista, drawn back from the line of infantry and cavalry. It looked a meagre force if the intention was to stop the Britons passing between the town and the forest on the southern side, but that did not take into account the dreadful killing power of the armament on the southern and western walls. Eighteen ballistas in all and each one capable of hurling two hundred pounds of split pebbles in netting, or the four foot darts that could cut a swathe through a ten man deep rank.

It was clear that the Britons in the front of the army coming across the field was deathly reluctant to get within range of the town walls, but the pressure behind was relentless. The dark rivers of men had dwindled down and now the watchers on the walls could see totally different rivers with gleaming helmets and shields spilling out and then forming up in line five cohorts wide. The shields moved forward in unison and even half a mile away the clash of the swords on them and the shouts of the men could be heard over the noise of

panic stricken enemy. Panic stricken, but dangerous all the same, the body of men split into two parts, one to bypass the town, the other to cross the bridge -, but the bridge was only one hundred yards from the town walls. Few reached it, as the range shortened the wall ballistas stopped using the darts for fear of them harming the legion behind the mob that was fighting to break free of the twin goads. One or two cohesive groups got as far as the bank, well upstream, but the mobiles and half a century took care of them easily enough.

To the south the charging Britons were almost literally bowled over by the storm of dart and shot from the wall, cohesion there was lost too. Hundreds of disorganised warriors and a score of the splendid chariots reached the line, but short as it was, it never showed any sign of weakening. The cavalry charged in alternate swoops from left to right across the rear, lances plucking and dropping bodies from the mass while the mobiles played a static role, simply shooting into the body of warriors boiling between the cavalry assault and the immovable line. A hundred or more Britons charged past the line and a horn sounded to send one half of the cavalry off in pursuit. It ceased to be a battle then. The remaining Britons to south and west flung down their weapons and waited sullenly for the legion and the town centuries to herd them into manageable groups. They knew what awaited them, Windubro was famous for not employing slaves, but being a vigorous slave trading nation. Still slavery was better than death and with luck a British warrior slave would find employment as a bodyguard, or a guard at one of the Roman mines - on the other hand he might find himself working in the mine or being bought as a gladiator. One was as short a life as the other and the only thing that made a gladiator's fate more attractive was the fact that he would be fed properly and see daylight.

Windubron casualties were light this time, the battle had gone as planned - in a manner that few ever do. One cavalryman had fallen from his horse and been trampled during a swoop on the rear of the Britons and two men from the line had been killed by one huge warrior who leapt the shields in a fantastic show of strength that drew gasps of admiration from any with time to spare., but behind that line was the next and after his brief spell of mayhem the man was cut down from both sides.

The British army was calculated to have been over seven thousand strong and the legionary officers who thought about such matters wondered uneasily who it was that had wielded such control over these usually unmanageable men that they had filtered through the forest of the west without a welter of pillage and rape to advertise their presence. Whoever it was, it was hoped he was dead - or that his influence was at least. The legion was out in force for the simple reason that it had never been done before and Lord Lucius was determined that his young, almost juvenile officers begin to learn the arts of co-

operation in large scale field manoeuvres and the organisation of marching camps. They had been twelve miles to the south when news reached them from Cantodunon of the attack on Windubro. The legion had rapidly discarded its heavy equipment, each man carrying just two pilum, a sword, shield, two pounds of cracked wheat and a pound of dried berries and imported raisins (Windubro was rich nowadays). The twelve miles of forest tracks had been covered in three hours and the men hardly paused to draw breath before falling on the rear of the British army. It was a demonstration not merely of the legionaries staying power, but of the capabilities of its junior officers. Lucius could not have been happier at the result of the emergency, but now there were the events of the previous day to deal with.

The parade was held at the centre of the parade ground and pickets were stationed around it to keep the population and the rest of the legion from hearing what was said. Surveying the survivors as they stood on three sides of a square, Lucius was struck again by the difference between these youths and the Roman legion he had learnt his trade with. That and his satisfaction with the forced march and battle tempered his language.

"Yesterday you lost a battle and were only saved by the town ballista and the two officers that held the infantry together." There was a pause during which he scowled, it seemed, at every man in turn, "It was a stupid battle and an unnecessary one. Signals had been sent to Cantodunon - it could not be known that we were so close -, but at the worst, half a legion would have been here by tomorrow morning. There was nothing the Britons could do against the town. You were safe behind and atop its walls - they were standing uncomfortably against the forest boundary in the knowledge that if they moved a couple of hundred paces closer to you, the ballista would slaughter them. As indeed they did today.

"You are very fortunate that the final withdrawal from the field went so well and that you behaved impeccably today, standing and fighting, without any heroics ... exactly as I have taught you."

His fists clenched in front of his chest, the thick black brows crushed down on his face and he practically snarled, "Were it not so, you would have been paraded and every tenth man executed right now. You lost me over two hundred good soldiers. Just remember that when the booty you won is distributed at Lunasa feast in six weeks time. There is blood on it - there is on most booty -, but this was unnecessary blood."

Drawing himself in again he delivered one last sentence, "You are the survivors of centuries that fought well, but as infants, warriors - not legionaries; make me proud of you

in the future." He flung them a clenched fist salute, spun on his heel and strode back to the presidium. Shortly afterwards orders were posted outside the legion's shrine, confirming Caroc as centurion of the fourth century, third cohort, Legion primus. Optios from the Windubron garrison and the rest of the legion took over as non-substantive centurions for the other vacant posts.

Caionac was summoned to Lord Lucius's private office; he was thankful for that, there would be no damned Greek or Gaulish clerk listening beyond the door. Lucius was standing behind his desk when the primus entered, solid, dark featured and an intimidating four inches over six feet tall. Caionac was surprised to see that his Lord's face was not as stony and stern as he had expected.

He was astounded when he was told, "Sit down lad, I've got a few hard things to say, but you don't have to be uncomfortable to hear them."

The hard stool he indicated was not exactly comfortable, but Caionac was glad to be seated. Bolt upright, hands clasped before him and head staring straight forward he waited.

"You were in charge of this garrison, responsible for the lives of every man, woman and child within it. In your hands lay their complete welfare and their hopes for the future." Lucius's dark eyes stared hard into the Celt's blue ones, "That's a fair statement of the situation as it stood forty eight hours ago?

"Yes? Yes it is and it is small comfort to either of us. You saw a horde of warriors, seemingly disorganised and you despised them for their lack of order and discipline. You looked at your men and saw a Roman legion, proud and invincible. How could you lose?"

Lucius sat abruptly, dropping into a broad armed chair behind his desk and leaning forward across it with both arms braced on its scarred top. "I'll tell you how you lost, lad. Firstly, this is not a Roman legion we have out there; we're getting there it's true, but you've got a long hard road to tramp before it is a proper legion. The battle you've just fought has taken you a fair distance along that road, some of the men have line mates they can trust and put full reliance in. Others know what it is to lose a line mate - and what a blow that is to confidence - and their new line will forge links that are stronger than the old ones simply because the men know that they have to be stronger., but a Roman legion has eight of its ten cohorts that are largely formed from men who have fought together for four years and more. They know their place in the line instinctively, they can find it and

hold it in the dark, in the midst of battle or, at its worst, in retreat. Your men will come to know that too, but it will take time.

"Now, we know what you did wrong - you were arrogant and greedy for the spoils of war. Good! I saw you nod, no need for words now. " The young man could not have spoken anyway, he had come into this room expecting to be roasted and so far Lucius's tone had been almost paternal.

"What you did right was - set the town's defences to their best disposition, deployed troops properly, initiated a prompt withdrawal when the chariots appeared and, late though it was, recovered almost half the men. You know, don't you, that we might easily have lost the lot? I've had all the reports here," One hand indicated a pile of papyrus and wax tablets, "two or three minutes later and the chariots would have charged into unprepared men. Your cornuti's signals and the centurions swift response saved the infantry. That brief period changed the pattern that was being established, the chariots were neutralised, the centuries reformed and drew back smartly in good order.

"Your temporary rank as primus will cease when the garrison is brought back to full strength again, but your record is marked positively. You made a blunder; don't ever do it again, but don't let it frighten you either. You are primus until the middle of July, primus Dungan will expect to receive back four full centuries of infantry and replacements in the cavalry and artillery. See to it, Caionac. Dismiss!"

Caionac left the room in a daze, stumbling as he descended the stairs to the mansion's public rooms, his guilt had lifted in a miraculous manner. The legion was his family - not his only family, but his closest - and General Lucius his father. On that extraordinary day he felt a depth of loyalty and personal commitment that left him with tears in his eyes. Tears that he was careful to dash away with the sleeve of his tunic before he emerged into the daylight.

Chapter two

Venutius, Prince of the Southern Brigante was unhappy. The magnificent chariot that he had ridden as his army constructed several relatively smooth tracks on its way to the conquest of Windubro, was lost. More accurately, abandoned, for the trackways that had made possible the movement of ten thousand warriors around the major settlements between western Britain and the Midlands were just as easily followed in the opposite direction by their pursuers. A handsome man of middle height and sturdy build, his narrow features were narrowed even more by the set of his jaw and the louring frown of his brows. Blue eyes glared, uncommonly black hair straggled unkempt - he was angry as well as unhappy.

The forest was hot, damp, muggy. Flies were an ever present impertinence upon the body of the Prince. Despite the discomfort Venutius insisted on wearing his beautifully embroidered tunic and breeches, golden lunae below his neck and torcs, rings and brooches about his arms and waterproof cloak. Splendidly apparisoned, he sat despondently upon a horse that was three hands taller than the Brigantean hill ponies that his chiefs rode. It had been three years now since he had 'married' Cartimandua, Princess of the northern Brigante - and the amalgamation of the tribes had not given him a kingdom of north and south. In some manner that he did not understand, the wretched woman (a handful of years older than his thirty one when they married) had acquired greater importance, while his standing within the councils had lessened. Now it was 'Queen' Cartimandua and he was her 'consort'.

This expedition should have changed all that. His raid of ten thousand warriors onto the rich land of the Midlands and conquest of the fabled town of Windubro and its wizards, should have made him a hero and King of the Brigante. The land he ruled should by now have stretched from the west coast to the Trent. What had gone wrong? He knew that the conception of the raid had been sound and his deployment of the various bands of warriors along parallel paths and his control of them had been brilliant. Venutius was not an ignorant man nor blind to his own faults and strengths; as a trusted friend of Rome he had visited Gaul and Rome, rubbed shoulders with Roman generals and government officials of high rank and had not been slow to learn ways in which he could, if not control, at least guide the fractious British warrior class.

When he learned from the tribes local to the town that Windubro had only a small garrison he had thought that the great deed was all, but accomplished, bardoi would sing his praises in the halls of the Brigantes, warriors would recount and embellish the glorious

assault on the meagrely defended town. No-one told him of the terrible machines on the town walls. He shuddered at the memory and the impression he must have made as he stared, slack mouthed at the sudden slaughter of scores of his warriors when they were still a quarter of a mile from the walls! It was so abrupt. At one moment he was leaping along in their company, singing and bellowing threats of annihilation at the tiny enemy figures seen lurking atop the battlements, and the next moment there was an horrendous crashing noise, dark streaks cut through the horde left and right of him leaving windrows of dead and bleeding and even more horrifying a dark object hurtled down almost vertically and burst amongst a great cloud of dust that shot out shards of stone that cut down a twelve foot circle of men.

The shouts had stopped then, the songs froze and all that was heard before the second volley swept into his army was the sobbing and crying of desperately wounded men. Venutius's response had been swift despite his shock and he had congratulated himself on the rapid withdrawal to safety.

But the next day had been worse, after a night of councils, of advice, of argument it had seemed like a gift from the Gods when the Windubrons sent out their puny troops, effectively shielding his own from the artillery. His chariots had leapt out of concealment and very nearly cleared the Windubrons from the field, while his own men were charging past the previous killing ground with the walls seeming within their grasp. Who would have thought that the ballista (he had seen ballista in Gaul, but never working) could be so accurately operated to miss their own men and slaughter his? And the fast moving, small ballista - he would give his eye teeth for a dozen of them.

So his thoughts ran as his horse trudged along the rough forest trail - more of a deer track than anything else. Cartimandua's influence would be all the greater now - even more the Queen, his reduced army of three thousand beaten men, tired and bedraggled from the need to move along a myriad beast tracks, would be a laughing stock. He pounded his fists on the saddle cloth folds as his mind sought for some means of recovering his reputation. They would pass through the Cornovi on their way home, a poor, disorganised collection of tribes without any large settlements, but the richest flocks of sheep in the west. Enough horse warriors to make a normal raid dangerous, but Venutius had three thousand. He spent the next hours until the evening camp organising his thoughts and sending off messengers to his scattered force. They would take a welcome tribute of sheep to his tribes even though they had suffered such a loss of men, possibly a column of slaves for execution on Mam Tor to mark his 'triumph'. A bleak smile acknowledged the thought - and its dishonesty.

Cantodunon Late June AD 39

The man who sat on the river bank watching the bore rush upstream to crash against the leat dam and bridge a mile away, was born a Roman. To be more exact he was an Alexandrian Roman, born of an Egyptian woman and a Roman patrician and educated in Alexandria. Now he was virtually King of the land that lay along the banks of the Trent in the midlands of Britain.

Peaceful, solitary moment like this were not frequent. Although he kept state business to what he referred to as 'office hours', retiring to his private rooms when the clerks of the Praetorium ceased work, the mansion was rarely quiet. He and Myrcal entertained often, British princes, merchants, visitors from Gaul flocked to the town drawn by its increasing influence, burgeoning trade and, for the Britons at least, the sheer wonder of an organised town with neat wooden dwellings for its Celtic citizens and soldiers, and large civic and military buildings that were now being rebuilt in the local limestone. There was only one other town like it in Britain and that was the founding town of Windubro built almost six years ago when Gregory and Lucius had taken a handful of Catuvellauni and created an outpost for the powerful king of south-eastern Britain, that was both a buffer for his northern border and an insurance against premature death at the hands of his sons.

The stratagem had succeeded for Cunobai was still in good health and actively expanding his kingdom to the south west, and Caradoc and Togadumnos pursued their own ambitions without any apparent attempt to curtail his own. Windubro's first year had seen the growth of a disciplined force that would have formed the core of an avenging army had Cunobai died unexpectedly. That force was divorced from the politics of the king's court, unaffected by the family and tribal loyalties that seethed amongst the nobles of the south-east and Caradoc, at least, respected the unstated threat.

Gregory shifted his, buttocks, the grass was sparse here and the ground hard after four weeks of blazing sun - and he was not a well padded man. Both he and Lucius were taller than average, but whereas his friend was heavily built, Gregory was lean, with a sparse head of blond hair and a projecting beak of a nose. That and his striding gait had earned him the affectionate sobriquet of 'the crane' - not a name ever to be uttered in his presence, but one he was aware of nevertheless. Idly his eyes scanned the river debris, mud and bubbles bobbing vigorously in the wake of the bore and down stream, half a dozen seagoing ships shaking their masts and rigging alongside the upriver quays. He had chosen this spot because it fronted the grain warehouses and Cantodunon was neither importing barley nor exporting wheat at this time of year, whereas the trade in cut

boards, ironwork, vegetables, tools, hides, wool and weapons flowed outwards practically all year round and the inflow of raw materials, cloth, wine and other luxuries was just as vigorous. The citizens of Windubro (he would have to try and change that name for this state that had developed along the river; it was confusing), had taken to civilised life very rapidly, partly because the average age was so young and partly because every one of them owned wealth, silver coins - often buried beneath the hearthstones - which made them unique amongst the commonality of Britain. Most of the men and women in the town produced something for trading in the regular markets or directly with the ships at the quayside, whether it was vegetables, chicken or pork raised on the small plots of land around their wooden huts, or the more valuable goods that the skilled citizens turned out in riverside workshops.

It was totally unlike the life that they would have led in other parts of the country.

Gregory's musing was interrupted by cries of anger and shouted orders. More boatloads of captives from the recent battle had arrived at the bank above the dam and were being driven towards the ships that would transport them to the slave markets in Gaul. He did not tolerate the use of slaves in Windubro - in his opinion they were dirty and untrustworthy, even more importantly they gave rise to a huge class of unemployed poor in the towns and cities of Rome, a constant threat to good order that he was determined would not happen in Britain. Gregory had decreed that no slaves were used in his land -, but that was no reason to ignore the trade and a large part of Windubro's income for the next few weeks would stem from the sale of more than fourteen hundred warriors, most would fetch at least one hundred sesterces, even though the market would be saturated - and some would bring very much more. One and a half million at a conservative estimate, half of that to the legion funds, a quarter to Windubro's state coffers - and a fifth of the latter would swell the bounty that was distributed to every citizen in both towns and the score of settlements along the Trent, the remainder would swell the personal fortune of Lucius and himself. The distributions were made at the four Celtic celebrations, Samain, Imbolc, Beltane and Lunasa and were accompanied by a night of feasting, singing, drinking and most frequently - coupling. Very many babies had their birth dates on a feast day. Gregory made a swift calculation, the citizens, military and civil, numbered more than fifteen thousand. Allowing for the differences in rank, these slaves represented an addition of two small silver coins to each hoard under Windubron hearths.

The industries that ran off the power supplied by his watermills would earn more than that for each man and woman, the thirst for cut planks of half seasoned timber, billets of iron and steel, agricultural tools and now, a growing flow of cheap pottery seemed unending. Sooner or later the commerce that crossed the channel would make Rome look on the

island with greedy eyes. Greed would overcome the reluctance to break August's ordinance against further expansion of the Empire and there would be an invasion., but not yet; Gregory and Lucius were carefully fostering the traders who came to Britain and, for the time being at least, the wealthy merchants and magnates saw more to gain from trade than in persuading the Emperor to risk the expense of transporting legions across the sea - a notoriously treacherous sea.

The noise of the embarkation had disturbed his mood, it was, in any case, time to check on the Praesidium offices, Lucius would be doing the same for the legion's Principia clerks. And then off to his home, the private rooms and garden in the stone built State House. Not that he would find peace there, Myrcal was born to the Parisii and steadfastly refused to treat their two children in the Roman manner and have them housed with nursemaids in their own part of the house. In Celtic fashion they roamed the rooms freely, even young Caley seemed to make good speed on hands and knees from the private rooms to Gregory's study upstairs, and demand attention. Primus, Caley and another on the way.

Slowly he got to his feet, the damp British winters had brought him the curse of rheumatism and he had not been taking his customary exercise recently. He passed through the river gate, a modest affair in the wooden wall that divided town from docks, the meagre chances of any ill-intentioned horde attempting an assault from the river, did not require the expense and inconvenience of the sturdy defensive walls and ditches along the other walls. This part of town was entirely populated by the squares of ordinary houses, simple wooden huts measuring twenty four feet by twelve sitting on concrete and pounded stone foundations, they were becoming the standard dwelling in Britain wherever machine sawn boards made them possible and economical. Six of these homes occupied a plot of land sixty feet by sixty six feet which left a small amount of land at the centre for growing vegetables, raising pigs, goats or chickens. The individual plots were small, but there were over five hundred of them within Cantodunon's walls - which amounted to almost twenty acres capable of producing food and utilising much of the town waste. The gardens also served as fire breaks.

That had been Gregory's initial idea when they planned the much smaller Windubro six years ago, but a side product of this independence of the town was the effect that the possession of land had upon the citizens. A growing number already possessed land around the town, cultivating it in the labour time that they had free after meeting the town's requirements - or paying a tax in lieu of that labour, but land that surrounded your home was more immediate and intimate. A Roman legate would have been horrified at his legion living in a fortification that was part farm, but then he would not have been happy at the

legion spending a tenth of its time in civilian tasks nor of the younger civilians spending a similar amount of time in martial training.

Sounds of training were discernible as soon as Gregory passed through the first rank of housing plots. The parade ground flanked the Principia and served to review the legion - the exercise ground, some two acres of levelled land, lay outside the walls. As Gregory walked around the square, heading for the road that led from its north eastern corner to the State House and his own apartments he saw that the exercises were simply marching drill and did not spread onto the road. There were times when that could be a nuisance; the idea of making the parade ground level with the road surface had been Lucius's and it had happened before the villas on the opposite sides of the road had their foundations laid. Visiting merchants and chieftains were housed there now, as well as senior officers and Cantodunon councillors and merchants. The road extended the parade ground by forty feet and although it was not used often, when it was, a howl of protest went up from the current occupiers of the visitor's villas. That extension allowed infantry charges in columns of sixteen legionaries right up to the Praetorium - it was a very noisy exercise. On the other hand Gregory admitted, the sight of mobile ballista and legion cohorts co-operating in complex manoeuvres was a salutary one for outsiders.

All the buildings at the centre of the town on the via Principalis were of white limestone and concrete, the State House and Praetorium as the most important and largest, had an eighty yard long frontage of gleaming walls and carved wooden columns enamelled in animalistic designs that curled and cavorted across the surfaces in exuberant Celtic fashion. There were several bath houses; a double-sized, fireproof Ceilidh house and a temple to the guardian God of Cantodunon, Sucellos - although the Nematon lay outside the town as was proper and overlooked it from small knoll at the edge of what had once been dense forest. Gregory could have made a shorter walk to his apartments, but this little tour of the most splendid buildings in the town (particularly the Forum, on the other side of the State House and now nearing completion as a team of Greek mosaicists decorated the floor in the main hall), gave him a great deal of pleasure. It was a superb achievement to have developed two towns in an unsophisticated Celtic land - Cantodunon was both an architectural and commercial achievement - and it was making Lucius and himself extremely wealthy, even by Roman standards.

The two legionaries guarding the house door drew themselves up and saluted as the major-domo opened it smartly. Idly, Gregory wondered precisely how the man managed to open the door so neatly that his master could walk straight in without breaking step and yet with it being open to the world for the bare minimum of time. He gave him a smile in

recognition and then abandoning all dignity, ran up the stairs calling the names of his wife and children in a long and accustomed homecoming litany.

Margit's husband Gwillam had possession of a house that was four time the size of the common ones, and divided into four rooms. As the town's chief shepherd, with responsibility for the management of a flock of some five thousand sheep he had the same standing as a centurion. They had lived there for three years come fall and apart from the obvious Celtic decorations there was little to mark it as different from the home of a Roman craftsman. The two women whom Margit paid to help look after the house and three children did not live in, they had their own households. She insisted on attending to the pigs herself, although the old sow, Maeve had died of a broken pelvis when her forefeet slipped off the wall she had made a habit of leaning on. It was a sad loss and Margit was inconsolable for ten days, but there were other sows and soon she was conducting her normal discussion of neighbourhood affairs with a sleek young pig with large black spots along each flank.

"Pigs is people." She declared, and indeed both Margit's sows showed an uncommon interest in her conversation, it would not have surprised Gwillam if they had developed a knack for understandable responses. The sow was not the most important tragedy in their lives, Margit had one stillbirth and one baby of nine months that took a fever and died within two days despite anything the Druid medico could prescribe. Still they had little Brennan, at five years sturdy enough to assist the shepherds in the daytime and two girls, Conine (four years) and Myrcal (two) - and it was clear from looking at Margit's plump figure which was filling out to her accustomed summer time shape; that there would be another bed made up in the nursery before winter set in.

Gwillam remembered his old home in the south-east, when he had been a young shepherd virtually owned by Cunobal, even though he had six sheep of his own. He and Margit had shared the family round house with his parents, married brothers and sisters and their progeny. There's was a six foot wide space by the door hole. It was uncomfortable to say the least. And every baby that was born was another drain on the meagre resources of food - not that the family was in danger of starving -, but the apportionment and consumption of grain, vegetables and a small amount of meat engaged the full skills of his mother who was responsible for feeding the household. Looking across his - their living room now, admiring the sheepskins on the floor, the decorated plaques on the walls, tables and chairs with arms made in proper fashion with glued joints, he could not really believe in the hovel he remembered - it was a distorted dream. An unpleasant, unwelcome memory.

The chair he sat in now was wide and sturdy with carved back rest and arms, and cushions that Margit had stuffed with goose and duck down. It had taken more than a year for her to collect or buy enough down and the stuff had floated about the house while she worked on the covers, little pieces finding their way onto food, the mead and their clothes., but eventually the task was finished and the result was supremely comfortable, wide enough for the two of them (except when she was in the final month or two of pregnancy). As chief shepherd he no longer had to spend long hours with his flock in the fields and the slopes of newly cleared forest, he and his two dogs now finished work at least three hours before sundown in high summer and sundown in winter. He had had to learn to read and write though and that was a chore that had taken him a full twelve months to complete to the point where the clerks were satisfied with his reports and accounts. Fully half the adults in this town could read now - even in the smaller town, Windubro, there were probably more literate Britons than the rest of the country - and it made a difference to life! On a small shelf in the corner of this room lay a fine copy of Columella's *'On Agriculture'* a gift from his wife and the result of a protracted cross-channel bargain with a Gaulish trader. That corner was now a shrine to Anu the goddess of fruitfulness and prosperity, and his gratitude for the power that had taken over his life at the age of twenty and changed it in ways he would never have dreamt of then.

Lazily he looked across at Margit, half sitting, half lying in the nest of cushions and bolsters that she favoured late in her pregnancy. She was sound asleep - and now he had thought about it, that suited Gwillam well, his sudden surge of lust was already being submerged in an even stronger urge to sleep. It had not been a hard day, but with town guard exercise at sunup, a long one. A few minutes later and they were both snoring lightly in unison.

Gregory's run up the stairs carried him through an archway and into their central living room.

"Greetings Gregory." Lucius voice boomed at him from a wriggling pile of children, his own three and Primus and Caley, "Come and join the fun." Gregory's immediate response was quelled by Myrcal's light frown, delivered from the comfort of her padded nursing chair and over the busy noises of her youngest.

"Fun? Damn it Lucius, I was looking forward to a little peace. Now we'll not get the children off to their room until you take yours away!"

Lucius had the most expressive eyebrows of any man in the town - they had an advantage in being prolific and black as candle soot, but nevertheless his manipulation of them was always masterly, now their gyrations succeeded in developing lewd overtones. "A little peace?" - little peace for Myrcal I suspect, eh?" He collapsed on the floor again under the weight of the joint family, "No, no peace for you tonight, but not because of this lot, Catlin is with your nurse taking a recipe for a mild fever."

"Oh?"

A bellow from the Lord General of Windubro heralded a shrewd blow from one of the youngsters and then, "Nothing to worry about, she'll be finished soon and can take Mela and the twins back to our apartment - then Myrcal can put your brood away. We need to talk before the Council is called in the morning."

Gregory pulled a wry face, "So, you must have ridden part of the night and all today to get here - and you've called a Council Meeting! Isn't it a bit early, I've had no reports yet from the legion scouts. Last seen, the Brigantes were following the right bank of the Trent through the Coritani country."

"I have later news than that, a signal came up from Windubro - arriving just as I was cooling off in the bathhouse. How come the messenger didn't find you first?"

An impatient hand flicked away the question, but the smudge of forge soot on his tunic gave a clue, "Right. So we have a meeting tomorrow and" He turned to greet Catlin, "Lady."

Catlin was a tall woman, as tall as Myrcal, but, whereas Gregory's wife was dark with deep brown eyes, triangular face and prominent cheek bones, Catlin had softer features altogether and her rounded chin already showed signs of developing another beneath it. When Lucius looked at her he saw a woman little different from any Roman matron, somewhat complacent with small interest outside her children and home. Gregory was making the comparison now - and not for the first time. She made him, not nervous, but impatient with her normally placid acceptance of life - the only time he had seen (or rather heard) any great emotional expression was the day that one of her husband's discreet conquests was brought to her notice by a friend. Lucius kept his exploits well away from the towns, but on this occasion, the small settlement of Coritani had visiting cousins from Ratas. He had not recognised the woman, but there was no chance of his heavy frame being mistaken and two days after his return a whispered conversation in the tepidarium of the stone-built bathhouse that graced the via Primus (and sitting squarely opposite the

State house), revealed every known detail of the passing affair. He was even more careful after that.

A few minutes of noisy bustling saw wives and children leave for their separate nurseries and Gregory and Lucius moved into the small room that was used for informal dining. It had tables large enough for two already set out and a scattering of armed chairs that were comfortable for eating in and lounging afterward. Two servants brought in a selection of dishes and proceeded to set them out on smaller tables either side of two dining tables brought together to accommodate three diners. Catlin would eat with the children as she usually did, but not Myrcal.

Lucius was Gregory's general and usually deferred to in military matters, but Myrcal, apart from being his wife, was a ship owner and merchant with widening interests in Gaul and the northern sea. As the sole remaining child of one of the most important Parisi nobles she would inherit property, treasure and ships from both parents. When that happened, the additional wealth she was building through trade from Cantodunon and the Rhine would make her the richest and most influential noble of her native tribe. It was not purely affection that made her an integral part of the triumvirate that ruled the two towns, Gregory's 'Queen' cemented commercial and tribal alliances that multiplied the power of their two towns. The two men nibbled and chatted while they waited, but there was no discussion of Lucius's news until Myrcal strode into the room and curled up on the seat at Gregory's side.

"Well my two warriors, what is our Council meeting tomorrow to discuss?" She reached out to take a linen cloth and pick up a small cooked bird in its folds, carefully breaking it apart. Bright blue eyes continued to quiz Lucius as she bent her head to tear flesh from the separated bones.

"The Brigante are gathering again."

"Eh?" Gregory was incredulous, "I thought we'd just seen the last of them - we must have slaughtered or captured more than half. What do they think they can do with five thousand that they were unable to do with ten?"

"Oh no. They are not heading for us this time." Lucius stopped to appreciate his own bird before tearing into it; no dainty linen cloth for him, his hands were already greasy with the oil from a cut of pork. Lucius had acquired the Celtic liking for meat and now ate it with gusto.

"No, no. They are apparently heading into Cornovi lands - and they would not have bothered to reassemble unless they had plans of conquest or pillage."

Myrcal wiped her lips and placed the soiled linen with its discarded contents on the table, picking up a clean cloth as she did so. "Have we any alliances with Cornovi?"

A shake of his head punctuated Gregory's answer, "No. They're a diffuse tribe ... if you can even call them a tribe." He looked across at Lucius for confirmation - it was his surveyors and scouts who collected information and drew maps of the countryside and peoples they contacted.

"H'mm." acknowledging Lucius's nod, "The largest grouping we have observed was nearly one thousand. They live mainly in small settlements of shepherds and herders. The army noted a town of about two hundred hutments within a rudimentary ditch and wall that seemed to be intended to control cattle rather than be defensive.

"How far have we penetrated their lands, Lucius?"

"Not exactly penetrated, we've had no real interest in them as yet. They seem to have nothing that we would want to trade for, rather scraggy hill sheep ... some vicious cattle about three quarter the size of ours and we found no manufacturing of any sort. They probably barter for anything more than crude pottery and wooden implements. We sent out four parties of scouts. Absolutely no trouble - in fact a very peaceful people. They seem to avoid trouble with neighbours by keeping away from them and scattering amongst the hill country at the first sign of any threat.

"It seems to work; my men found no evidence of any serious incursions from the Brigante, Decangli or even the Ordovices in the last two generations."

Lucius pondered for a second or two, "You asked how far..... Well, since they don't have anything worth calling a town I don't think they have any names - leastwise we didn't come across any. River and hill names - and plenty of small hill forts, of course. Let's see."

They waited as Lucius evidently called his maps to mind, he had a very firm grasp of the lands they had surveyed. Not necessarily in terms of accurate distances, but certainly in related landmarks of the kind he had just mentioned. It was a long process and Gregory and Myrcal picked at the supper dishes patiently.

"Right! I have it now." Lucius pushed his table away and got down on hands and knees to lay out strands of wool that he plucked from the loose weave of his overshirt. A long,

kinked line made of three strands on the tile surface went down first, "Here is our river, the Trent, and here," a shorter strand lay almost at right angles to it, "is the Dove coming down from the north and joining the Trent opposite Windubro..

"We've explored as far west as the Severn, crossing the Stour. A short survey south to a ridge they call Wen or Wend that overlooks a wide stretch of forest. There's the largest hill fort in their country just a few miles north of Wen or Wend, it's called the Wrekin - a great knob of stone set down in flat land - looks like it was tossed there by some God. We didn't go further south, but reached up north to the Weaver and then traversed the hill country east again to the Dove."

The floor was littered with strands depicting rivers and small coils for hills; Lucius's shirt was decidedly tatty now, but he was clearly pleased with his dissertation. He got up from the floor, red faced and perspiring slightly - the thought crossed Gregory's mind that despite all the marching and riding his friend did, he ate far too much meat.

"That's it, a land of small settlements, one large hill fort, shepherds and cattle breeders - not very good cattle at that.

"And now, my friends the Brigante are gathering the remnants of their army just north of the Wrekin."

Gregory nodded, "You think they are going to raid the Cornovi?"

"Oh yes. The latest word we have is that Venutius has formed an encampment and is gathering every last one of his warriors to form a hosting."

"I'll wager that'll take some time, all the information we had until now, showed his force scattered over a hundred forest tracks - it'll take him ten days or more to remake an army."

Lucius pursed his lips and shook a head of black curls at his King - he was inordinately proud of those luxuriant curls, "Don't under estimate the Brigante, Gregory. They have organisation, nothing like ours, but enough to bring the scattered bands together and find provisioning for them too. I have a centurion from our Cantodunon legion whose family are of the Brigante. I've been learning from him these last months, since Venutius and Cartimandua got together with their different factions and began to form this federation they have beyond the central hills."

He caught an interchange of glances between Gregory and Myrcal and laughed, "Did you think that my forays to the north west were all pleasure?"

Gregory grinned back at him, "We know your propensities well enough, old friend, even if Catlin chooses to pretend she doesn't."

"Well you did me an injustice this time, I've had no other woman this last twelve months."

"Was it a strain?" Enquired Myrcal gently. Gregory's general harrumphed derisively and then resumed his exposition, "They might very well have an army in four or five days."

A shrug displayed Gregory's feelings about that, "What is it to us, though? Are the Cornovi worth making allies of that we should consider attacking this reformed army - that is what you are getting around to isn't it? What have we to gain?"

"Oh Gregory, think a little. Venutius is a prince of the Brigante ruling a large part of the Brigante federation - a woman, Cartimandua, rules the larger half and he has just lost several thousand men on a mad adventure into our lands. His worth has dropped - he is a defeated prince with a considerably reduced following. What will happen when he returns to his own lands with a third of his army? They ran like rabbits, you'll remember - hardly surprising really -, but the thing is that they turned tail and ran, scattering in the forest.

"What our Brigante prince has decided is that the shepherds and herdsmen of the Cornovi can be swept up by his five thousand warriors in the largest cattle and slave raid that part of the country has ever seen. Then he will return in triumph with a thousands of sheep and cows - and thousands of slaves - that land of the Cornovi isn't under populated you know, it's simply that the population is dispersed, diffuse -, but with an army that size he can extend a line over a front of twenty miles and harvest the Cornovi and their animals."

"Surely they have warriors, that would form bands and cut through so extended a front?"

"No."

It was brusque, a bald statement that took Gregory by surprise, but it showed Lucius's certainty in the matter.

"Well the other thing is, as I said before, 'What does it matter to us?' "

"Politics, husband. Politics." Myrcal had finished her meal while the other two talked and bathing her hands in the stream of warm water that a servant poured, turned back to them after a word of thanks to the girl.

"One. We do not want a strong Brigante federation being formed to the west and north - or anywhere come to that.

"Two. We need more men, more women, more horses."

"Dammit, Mycal. Have you seen their horses, they're tiny?"

"No, not tiny, but small I'll allow - and the Brigante use them to traverse the hills and raid their neighbours. We cannot use them for our heavy cavalry, but they need little grain, less grazing than our own and if Lucius cannot think of a use for them I'll do it for him."

Lucius's laugh was a bellow, "I can think of a use, don't worry ..., but you had something more to add?"

"I did, but it needs the answer to a question. You reached the Severn you said. How big was it?"

"How big?"

"Yes you loon, how big? Is it navigable? Will it take shipping?"

Lucius had clearly not considered this aspect of his scout's reports, "I don't know - I didn't see it myself, but I can find out."

"Do that Lucius. Now, the next question is how close does it run to the Trent and will our river take boats that far up?"

"The last part is easy, Lady. The Trent will carry barges ten miles upstream from Windubro and then there is a ford of sorts - more like a shallow ferry - where an old track crosses the river."

She raised her eyebrows at him, "I didn't know there was another track that close."

Lucius was quick to devalue the trackway, "Oh it's nothing like the Dubonos track, (this was the major trackway that ran from the south of Britain to the Abos just a few miles north

of Cantodunon) very little traffic on it. In fact it runs only a couple of miles north of Windubro, parallel to the river."

"A trackway that close?"

Shaking his head in denial Lucius went on, "It's little more than sheep tracks now. Might have been more when the Trent crossing was being managed properly, but that cuts it in half."

Gregory had been listening to the exchange with some amusement. He was unaware of the old track, but if Lucius thought it of little value to them he was willing to accept that, nevertheless... "You believe there was a ferry there at some time or the river was more fordable?"

"Oh yes, you can see a ruined collection of huts and a walled paddock that must have served travellers - and the remains of the track continues due south west."

"Ha!" Myrcal's ejaculation was almost triumphant, "South west, you say. And is that likely to be the nearest point on the Severn?"

A huge sigh gusted from the bulky body, Lucius was as tall as Gregory, but almost half as heavy again - a deep sigh was a momentous matter, "Myrcal, dear lady I have only seen the old hostel or cattle market - or whatever it was. We would need to survey the whole area from there to the place where my scouts saw the Severn several miles north." A wagging finger interrupted her imminent interjection, "Ah,ah. That particular task will take weeks - and there is a more pressing matter."

His black brows came together in puzzlement, "Anyway, what was your interest in the Severn and the old trackway?"

"Trade, you lummoX. Specifically the tin trade. Most of the tin exported to Gaul and Rome is traded by Spanish ships. They sail across the western sea to the south coast of Britain,"

"The Dumnonii?"

The fair head nodded, "The Dumnonii .. and then ship it to Gaul and Italy. Now my people would trade it too - tin is very profitable -, but they have to sail the length of the channel along the whole south coast and then back again - and it is a voyage that ships do not

make on their own because of the pirates in the south east. The Spanish usually have a small fleet of four or five."

"And the Severn?"

"Oh! The Parisii don't regularly voyage down the channel and along the south of Britain, but we have explored it a little and if a ship rounds the great rocks and promontory of the far south west and sails north east for a couple of days the cliffs gather in on each side and funnel it into the mouth of the Severn. It's difficult sailing because the tide is huge, more than twenty feet rise and fall and if there is a south west wind it can be impossible to sail out of again - until the tide is with you."

Myrcal's feature grew even more animated as she leaned over the table and made her main point, "Now if we can take boats up the Trent, build a road from there to the Severn, more boats can sail down it, out into the estuary and to the north coast of Cornwall. Tin! With your roads Lucius and my barges we can buy tin from the Cornovii and ship it across Britain to the Abos, quicker and more safely than the Spanish.

"Or, if we can find copper, we can sell bronze bowls, dishes, ornaments to Gaul, without the expense of buying the metal through three or four middle men."

Gregory thought that it was time to bring matters back to the fugitive army now forming again to the west, "That's all very interesting my Love .."

"Interesting!"

He recouped himself rapidly, Myrcal's trading enterprises were no minor affair, with two ships of her own, one of which had been captured at the battle on the Abos and several that she had bought interests in, his wife was already bidding fair to be the most important merchant trader among the Parisii. "We have Venutius to deal with first - then Lucius can carry out a proper survey of the south west. Your idea is that the two run together?"

He smiled at her energetic response, "You're probably right. Venutius won't give us much trouble, but putting him down has a number of probable outcomes.

"First, it removes one of the co-rulers of the Brigante - which leaves the other .. Cartimandua .. that much more secure - and with a larger more cohesive following .."

Lucius interrupted, "You're right on the first, but not on the second Gregory. I've travelled a large part of the Brigante country and there is a very good reason why they are a federation and not a kingdom - they fight and raid among themselves.

"We talk about Venutius and Cartimandua and their following as if they were the only princes of those tribes - they're not - they simply head the largest of the groupings. There must be another half dozen princes and they will descend on Venutius's holdings as soon as he is neutralised and divide them amongst themselves. In fact, Cartimandua may well have more trouble when Venutius's eliminated than she has now with his uneasy alliance - she'll sleep easier though!"

"Lucius!" Myrcal protested, but he couldn't take it too seriously - he had been an audience to too many of her somewhat bawdy discussions with her captain traders.

"Well he's a lusty man they say - she may even send a thank you gift."

Gregory re-established himself again, "So Venutius goes and we are not quite sure of how that will leave us in regard to the Brigante, but .. so far as the Cornovii are concerned we are welcome rescuers, saviours of their flocks and families. It will be a good recruiting ground and if they have little in the way of settlements we should be able to establish some of our own and wean them away from their present state of diffusion - after all, it seems likely that that is only a means of limiting the damage when their neighbours raid them. If we create fortified settlements, roads and decent government - water mills and industries can we make them loyal Windubrons?"

"Brioc is the man to consult on that, Gregory." Over the years Lucius had come to a grudging respect for the druid leader who acted as the two town's pontus maximus - and, seemingly, a countrywide network of priests and bardoi, who spread news, gave advice and under the guidance of the remarkable and aged archdruid Medoc, disseminated the doctrine that the State of Windubro was the destiny of Celtic Britain.

"Yes, the Council meeting tomorrow." Gregory was not done yet with the original subject, "From my memory of the maproom hides, the Cornovii inhabit lands along both banks of the Trent, the highlands around the headwaters of the Dove .. and now, you tell us, up to the banks of the Severn."

The white bull's hides of the maproom had been trimmed and shaped so that they fitted together and gave an informative picture of the lands they had explored so far, names of tribes, and the roads and signal post lines that the legion had established. It was not a

bird's eye view, but the marching distances were noted and the general direction of routes, the names of their settlements were written in ink and the garrison strength noted on scraps of parchment and pinned in place. Parchment was easier to obtain than papyrus and, given the huge numbers of sheep, there was no shortage of this reusable writing material.

Lucius nodded, "That's about it, I'm almost certain that both rivers are navigable - if not for Myrcal's trading barges, at least for legionary transport; the Stour is navigable too and there is a network of smaller rivers and streams - it's wasted on sheep and cattle. You could have as much water power as you wanted there Gregory."

"That's what I was thinking."

"And then my barge captains will ship it all through the Abos."

"Yes my love, but first we deal with Venutius and persuade his intended victims that their future lies with Windubro and her legions." The nearly bald head swiveled as he eyed his two companions, "I think that the next few days will see the two towns, truly begin to acquire the strength of a kingdom..... Did I tell you that Hero has found a way to throw Greek fire from a ballista? And it doesn't burn until the canister breaks and becomes wet - it's ideal to arm your ships with Myrcal."

She received the news cautiously, "I hope they are more reliable than his multiple arrow discharger that we mounted on the Fortunate Voyager, they sprayed out sideways severed a mainstay and the crew were close to executing the ballista men."

"Well, we'll see .., but now it's time for Lucius to bid us goodnight," He gave his friend a significant stare, "Eh, Lucius? There's much to do in the morning - you ought to have an early night."

"Ought I?"

"Yes Lucius. Goodnight."

Council meetings were not a means of persuading the town's leading men and the legion officers that they had a substantial hand in the running of the affairs of the towns; no-one had any delusions about that, quite clearly Gregory made the ultimate decisions. Nevertheless it was a debating house and much of what came out of the meetings

affected the governance of the people - and much of it was at some stage formulated by one or other of the Councillors.

The meeting next day consisted of a report from Lucius about the state of things to the west and Venutius's overt intentions in the land of the Cornovii, and then a general discussion about the size and makeup of the expeditionary force - and the cost in provisions and armaments. It was not a difficult meeting, the Windubro state was still at a stage where almost any military adventure produced more in the way of spoils and slaves than it cost. And the division of the spoils was stated quite clearly in the articles that Gregory, Lucius and Brioc the druid priest had drawn up a couple of years ago. The legion's share, the citizen's shares (military and civilian), the rulers of the towns and the town coffers were all strictly set out and painted onto bleached beech boards hung along the outside walls of the Council house. The rules took almost half the number of boards given over to law and hung on another wall - those boards seemed to increase quite rapidly though whilst the matter of shares remained unchanged - and satisfactory to all. The same could not be said for the laws.

The information brought in by Lucius's scouts indicated that the passage of Venutius's warriors and remaining chariots had cleared pathways through the forest that would speed the passage of the cavalry and ballista batteries. The ground was dry, generally unrutted, Lucius estimated that two columns of cavalry and ballista numbering eight hundred men, would come up with Venutius in two days - by that time, he believed, Venutius would have drawn out his line and begun driving the Cornovii before him. When the Brigante realised that Windubro had not forgotten or forgiven them, it would be too late, four highly mobile groups would be in position to split his army into five pieces. Lucius did not anticipate any serious resistance, even a highly disciplined army, spread for the sort of hunt that Venutius thought he would be conducting, would have been in no condition to resist stirrured heavy cavalry and agile ballista discharging four pound iron bolts.

To the question of whether increasing the size of their force would not be a reasonable precaution against an army of three thousand, Lucius answered, "If we try to take a large force along those tracks, they'll probably break up, our line will straggle out, men will be employed in repairing the tracks, rescuing ballista, servicing cavalry horses. We will slow right down, lose the advantage of surprise and risk Venutius being able to concentrate his army while we are still in the forest. I don't fancy that, gentlemen. No. Eight hundred is just right." He sat down and that was that. Messages were sent south along the line of huge semaphores that linked the two towns. Twice as tall as the normal eight foot posts, these were made of cut board six feet wide and could be read at a distance of six miles. Removing a post from the code group was a simple matter of turning it on its swivel so that

it was edge on to the line of signal. The nineteen group message took an hour and a half to travel the seventy miles to Windubro. Designated units left three hours later, with the whole of the June afternoon before them. There would be no camp, just a roll of oiled wool on the ground for each man and cold meat, bread and light ale as supper. Caionac led them, bursting with pride at the confidence Lucius showed in him.

At first light, the horses were rubbed down and saddled. Another cold meal taken from their individual packs and within three quarters of an hour they were travelling at the trot again, cavalry leading, ballista batteries following in their dust. "We always get the bloody rear." grumbled Dergol as he bounced along on a pad he had constructed on the bow of the machine - the other two men rode the horses), "Do we have to follow their tracks?"

"Not if you don't mind making a new trackway, friend." His optio was a young Parisii transferred from Cantodunon three weeks ago; Dergol had not made his mind up about him yet. He shut his mouth, as much to keep the dust out as any deference to discipline and strengthened his grip on the uncomfortable perch that at least saved him running alongside. The horse handler was always left to run alongside on the march, but not this time, not Dergol. An hour later he decided that trotting alongside was less agonising than maintaining his perch any longer. Nevertheless, he could make a better seat if he thought about it when they got back to Windubro - if Duor the master smith could invent things, why shouldn't he? He'd enjoy showing something like that to the bad tempered old curmudgeon.

His foot caught a loose root and he went flat, "Oh bloody hell!"

Gregory, Myrcal and Lucius had conferred again after the council meeting, for one thing there had been undercurrents of feeling that the Lord of the two towns had recognised, they were faint undercurrents, but they had stirred thoughts that had been on his own mind for a month or two. He had not shared them with his wife or his friend simply because they were too amorphous, but the comment he had heard one of the citizen councillors mutter crystallised the matter.

"Why are we protecting the Cornovii?" Donuil was a Parisii trader, who was thriving on the cut board trade and iron goods from Windubro and Cantodunon. Thriving so well in fact that he was paying the town for a stone and concrete villa being built just below the cliffs down river. Despite his normally sour nature and ludicrously (in Celtic eyes), plump features he had persuaded his fellow merchants on the Abos that he should represent their interests at the Council meetings.

"Yes, Donuil? I could not hear that clearly." Gregory's eyes were pale blue and combined with the proud beak of a nose they could have a chilling effect when he wanted. They glared intimidatingly now.

"Were you objecting to our expedition against the remnants of Venutius's army?"

The man wriggled uncomfortably on the wooden bench - there were no cushions in the Council House, Gregory felt it kept proceedings to a reasonable length. "Lord, they are no threat to us now - "

"They never were a threat, Donuil. A nuisance - and our men were a little incautious in looking to win booty -, but there was never any possibility of the Brigante breaking into the town."

"Yes, Lord., but ..."

"Hmmm?"

"Well, if they're no threat, why're we attacking them in Cornovit country? Lord."

"It's an opportunity." Gregory stretched back in his high backed chair, he had not intended to broach these waters at this meeting, but this too was an opportunity - and the wretched fellow did have a point. "Citizens, I must explain something of what the Lord Lucius has told us of the country and some of the development that Lady Myrcal made plain to Lucius and I.

"The land that we are sending our troops too is not occupied by any large, organised tribe. They are fairly populous, but have only one settlement that might be considered of even minor importance. For some generations they have simply scattered to small hill forts when raided by neighbouring tribes, their lands are hilly, good for grazing cattle and sheep, but so far not attractive enough for any enemy to expel them completely and form their own settlements -, but that could change."

"Now, why have we taken an interest?" Gregory raised his hands before him and slowly ticked off one finger after another.

"We need more people. We need more, able and trustworthy recruits for the legion and we have a growing trade in Gaul and Germania that can easily take more goods and raw

materials if we can supply them." Gregory glanced across at Donuil who nodded, but still looked far from convinced.

Another finger was folded down, "Until now most of our recruits have been boys and youths with just a spattering of older men. And that is because we have been recruiting from the warlike tribes and Lord Lucius and I have no wish to try and persuade experienced warriors to learn a new manner of making war.

"The Cornovii have few warriors, Windubro's Lord General believes that shepherds and cattlemen are tough enough to make good legionaries. There must be thousands of such men between the age of fourteen and .. thirty ?" He shrugged, looking for confirmation from Lucius who smiled and nodded.

"Our recruits, both military and civilian should not owe allegiance to any large tribal organisation or town. " The third finger folded and he went on, "The Cornovii have no firm allegiances other than to their immediate family and the small groupings of shepherds they live amongst -after a year most of them will make excellent citizens and the rest a good source of labour."

Fourth finger, "The Cornovii apparently occupy land that extends to the upper reaches of the Dove - an area that we know has lead and silver being mined by the bucketful - we could mine it more effectively. They spread around the banks of the upper Trent and now, we hear, those of the Severn too. The hill country abounds in streams that will run watermills, there is most probably more lead and silver, certainly iron and limestone - maybe copper! .. And both the Severn and the Trent would serve as waterways for small commercial boats - possibly large barges, with access to the West coast and the tin mines of the Dumnoni. The whole area is rich in things that uncivilised tribes have only a passing interest in -, but which we can turn into a burgeoning trade.

"The Cornovii are not unaware of their present predicament, simply unable to do much to avoid it. With one powerful stroke of our heavy cavalry and the mobile ballista we can eradicate Venutius, sieve the remains of his warriors for booty and at the same time establish a debt of gratitude with the Cornovii. With the help of the druidic college and the bardoi, that gratitude can be made to produce recruits and citizens and ensure that, if we do it sensibly and without seizing all the profits for ourselves, the lands of the Cornovii will be developed to our mutual benefit.

"The two towns and the small settlements along the Trent between Windubro and Cantodunon have a population of four and a half thousand civilians, there are two

thousand non-citizens. The legion has a total strength of just over five thousand men and has fifteen hundred recruits under training. We are a small nation, citizens - a medium sized Gaulish town has a greater population than us - there is nothing here in Britain that even compares to cities on the continent. However our military might is greater than that of a full Roman legion and our commercial strength exceeds that of most Gaulish cities -, but we need more population to continue our growth. We need the Cornovii."

He took a breath and recomposed himself, for a moment his enthusiasm had been greater than he considered proper for a ruler to exhibit. "That's why we want the Cornovii, and their lands, rivers and metal deposits and, in return, we will make them valuable citizens with comfortable homes, show them how to build roads, dig lead and silver ..."

"No slave mines then Lord?"

"No ! No slaves anywhere. A lead mine can be worked by paid labour and more efficiently."

He stood up, effectively bringing the meeting to a close, "That is all we know at the moment citizens and all that we expect to achieve. The army will set out from Windubro about noon. Good day citizens."

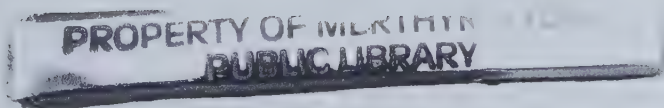
The twelve men and two women filed noisily out of the Council Room and Gregory reflected that it was growing too small. There was another like this at Windubro and a rudimentary election system to provide councillors for each. It had worked well for two or three years, but during that time the number of citizens had swollen to thirteen and a half thousand and about two and a half thousand non-citizens. If their plans for the enrolment of the Cornovii succeeded, the numbers of citizens could be doubled in the next twelve months.

Clearly a larger chamber was needed - and one that would have prestige. The production of concrete and stone building materials was supplying a small export trade, even while the prominent buildings in Windubro and Cantodunon were being slowly converted from timber to stone. It would be no great problem to stop the exports for some months and build a Senate House - it would be a greater problem to decide how the political structure (if it could be graced with such a description) should be changed to be worthy of an increasingly powerful State. And where would he place the Senate House? Building it in either Windubro or Cantodunon would automatically make either the capital of this state. Gregory did not feel that what were virtually fortresses that possessed the attributes of both town and legionary fortress, were really fitted to become capitals. There were other

matters too that he had let go by as the town's commerce and prowess had prospered, this new development demanded decisions for the future. Mentally he counted up the numbers of men and women that he wanted to form that decision making council beside Myrcal and Lucius - he wanted an odd number including himself and as ruler he would hold a casting vote - as well as a veto, if necessary. Roman democracy worked well in many ways, but

Gregory's education at Alexandria had not been wholly confined to mathematics, mechanics and Heron's inventions and systems, polemics, oratory and logic; Alexandrian academics had a wide interest too in political history including recent Roman history. The deified Augustus had never trusted his senators, most of the time he was at loggerheads with the Roman Senate and he only seemed to take notice of them when what they proposed or opposed, fitted with his own wishes - stated or not. Gregory had an advantage that Augustus lacked, the Senate was populated from the aristocracy of Rome and that had been established for a thousand years, or so it was claimed. British aristocracy consisted of warriors; the rulers of Windubro and Cantodunon had studiously avoided introducing any of them into their people - Gregory would create his own aristocracy. At the insistence of Myrcal and with the evidence before him of their value on the existing Councils, he would include women amongst his senators and again, but What to do about inheritance?

And still the problem of what official name to give the new State?



Chapter three

Camulodunon.

The king of the Catuvellauni, Cuneval, was still hale and hearty. The fact that he was still alive was largely due to the existence of Windubro. Five years ago the three Romans had arrived at Camulodunon, rich and naive, fondly believing that they could buy land in Britain, build a villa and farm and live like proper nobles. Every Celt knew that land was land - it did not belong to anybody - a man could not buy it. You might as well try to buy a river, or the sea or a sunset! Nevertheless they presented an opportunity for the king for whom the chances of surviving another year or two had looked increasingly poor as his sons, Caradoc and Togidumnos, grew impatient to divide the country up between themselves. After talking to the Romans for some weeks and learning of their expertise in weapons and training soldiers, he came to the conclusion that these refugees from Rome (for that is what they were, it seemed) could be given a group of men and women and sent off to his northern borders to build a fortress as a buffer against the Brigante. That was the openly acknowledged purpose, but in truth they were secretly sworn to him to instantly avenge him in the event of a sudden demise. Their lack of connection with any of the factions amongst the Catuvellauni nobility made the scheme logical - if they could build their fortress and their manpower before his sons became too impatient. It had taken two years.

When his spies told him that Windubro was thriving and had already acquitted itself against a raid on Ratas by a considerable force of Coritani, Cuneval breathed a sigh of relief. He judged the time ripe to let Caradoc and Togodumnos know that if he died early, Windubro would attack and coalesce the forces amongst his personal following into an effective and vengeful army. He believed that the scheme had worked. At least he was still breathing, Caradoc was expending his surplus energy in conquering the western tribes and Togodumnos had embroiled himself in a war with the Iceni around the Wash that he was neither losing nor winning. Cuneval leaned back in his fur padded great chair and chuckled, he was a stout man nowadays and a chuckle moved a lot of flesh, he felt confident in life and at that very moment felt a lively awakening below his rounded belly. Why not? It had been several days since his last woman. He looked about the room, apart from the women working at their spinning and weaving along one side of the hall, there were only his bodyguard in attendance. He had no kingly duties to perform. Now which one? One elbow resting on the arm of his chair and his chin supported on his clenched fist, the king leant forward to scan the circle of women. He felt like a lively girl today, a rumbustious bedmate - Ah, yes! His hand beckoned and getting to his feet he led the way out of the hall to his private chamber. Life was comfortable, interesting and, at last, relatively assured. Another king much further north was about to find quite the opposite.

It had taken Venutius seven days to assemble his host, confer with his chieftains and then despatch them to take up position along the line that he had mentally drawn between the Wrekin and the nearest point of the Trent. Along that line there was only one fortification and it was in a poor state, but the largest Cornovii settlement dwelt beneath the shelter of that great lump of a hill. One thousand men could sweep that settlement clean, and remove any of the natives who had reached the dubious shelter of the Wrekin itself. That left him two and a half thousand (he had gathered in a meagre reinforcement on the promise of the raid), to drive the Cornovii over a spread of twenty miles or so. He calculated that twenty five bands of one hundred men each would extract the most value in cattle and captives - with luck they would drive a day's march before they became bogged down with booty and had to make for the Brigante highlands. And glory!

Half a mile from Venutius's hosting, Caionac's scouts watched the movement of warriors in and out of the sprawling camps. Venutius had chosen an expanse of plain; on sandy, well drained soil dotted with dense clumps of broom that loomed dull and dark green now that their vivid spring and summer colouring of yellow flowers had fallen. The first rays of the sun fell full on the plain casting long, mobile shadows that left no movement of men no matter how small, concealed from the scouts. The Brigante prince had chosen it for his own convenience in assessing and managing his warriors, but from the point of view of a concealed enemy intent upon learning what it could from his movements, it could not have been better. Venutius's imaginary line ran roughly from the south west to the north east. Caionac's men were gathered behind a low ridge south east of that. The scouts watched one large contingent of men trot off to the south west, heading for the Severn which was about eight miles away. That movement was followed by a north eastern one of successive small bands of warriors despatched at intervals of a quarter of an hour. At that rate Caionac calculated, the first band would be close to the Trent in two hours. Only the first four bands had ponies - Venutius was stringing his army out. With no knowledge of any other force nearby he was forming his hunting line which should be in place allowing for a shortening of the despatch spacing as they headed for closer postings ... about ..

"Noon," the commander of Windubro's force struck his saddle with a clenched fist, "of course, they combine their attacks at the height of the sun. What could be easier?" He wouldn't have thought of that, Caionac ruefully acknowledged. Or would he? He had guessed the ploy hadn't he - what more likely than he would have devised the same plan in Venutius's shoes?

Did this affect the Windubron plans, such as they were? It suddenly struck him that he ought to confer with his officers. Lord Lucius had drummed home the value of staff command often enough. Eight hundred men was a small force admittedly, but Caionac

was quite aware that his command of it was both an exercise for the men and a test for him. After the debacle of the second Brigante attack he needed to demonstrate a maximum of competence. In his mind he multiplied his force by ten, to that of a full legion plus auxilliary allae and summoned a field staff meeting.

The expedition comprised six heavy cavalry squadrons and their eighteen scouts, and four centuries of mobile ballista; there were ten centurions plus a cavalry optio in charge of the scouts. They had an hour or two in hand before they were required to make a move, the Brigante had no hint of their presence and were concerned only with the forthcoming drive against the Cornovii. The Windubron scouts had been most careful to remain concealed and make sure that no opposing scouts made contact.

Cainoac made it a formal meeting, seating himself on a small folding stool as the others drew up logs or stones to sit in a circle with him.

"Gentlemen." He smiled self-consciously at the formality of his address, he might have been speaking to a group of town worthies rather than these youngsters - Huw was barely twenty - and some of them, particularly Lugdumnos, looked even younger. Although he was actually not the youngest, his round, freckled face made him seem to be barely into puberty - all the same he was an accomplished horseman and a vicious character in a melee.

One thing that made them look young compared with a similar gathering of 'uncivilised' (it was their description) Britons, was the fact that they were all clean shaven, following Roman tradition. Flowing moustaches **did** add years to a youthful face.

"... Gentlemen, we have time before we need to break camp - time to tidy up our planning. First; What is the present situation of the Brigante, Lanagon?" The optio of cavalry who had the scouts under his command stood up, as much to gesture as any acknowledgement of a difference in rank.

Pointing first to the south west, "The first body of Brigantes set off about two hours ago - there were one thousand of them all on foot - I'll expand on that after in a moment. The other warriors went off in smaller groups of around one hundred, you saw that the first few groups were mounted, those that followed weren't. Now, one thousand went south west, fifteen groups went to the north east and Venutius remains in front of us, just a mile away with four or five hundred men."

He paused, slowly scanning the faces of his fellows, "I have had two messengers, both from the south west. They report that nothing is happening. The Brigante travelled to within two miles or so of the settlement around the Wrekin and then halted. They had picked up a few Britons on the way - to be more accurate, they had **killed** a few Britons on the way and seem to have been successful in preventing any hint of their presence getting ahead of them. My last messenger, arrived half an hour ago and, as you can see," an eloquent hand indicated the clear skies to left and right of them, "there is no smoke.

"Even eight miles away we would have no difficulty in seeing the Brigante enjoying themselves in burning down round houses. There should be a cloud of black smoke from old, damp thatch drifting across the landscape."

"They're waiting until noon, optio. Venutius is timing his sweep to the noonday sun."

Lanadon sucked his teeth, "Pardon me primus, but I don't think so. My scouts tell me that the Brigantes were gathering bracken and hay for bedding."

Caionac cursed, so much for his idea of a synchronised sweep of the Cornovii at midday. For a moment the obvious answer eluded him and it was Huw who spoke up, "They'll launch the attacks at sunup. It's just as good a timekeeper in this weather as noon - and it gives them all day to gather cattle and slaves."

"Of course." He nodded in agreement, "Sunup. Well I don't suppose it makes much difference to us, we have five days of rations, good water for the horses.

"Let me have a report on your men, horses and equipment now, please gentlemen."

There were only half a dozen horses lamed by the trot along the forest tracks and more than enough remounts from the string carrying the next days rations. Five mobile ballista had suffered damage, three of them having come together when an over-enthusiastic driver attempted to pass his mates in the battery of three. One of those ballista was completely wrecked, but the other two had been cobbled together from its remains to make them, if not pretty, at least battle worthy. The other two had a broken wheel apiece and the two good wheels produced one usable ballista. The force was reduced to ninety four mobile ballista. The four artillery centurions considered that given the amount of time they now had, it was unlikely that more would be lost before they made their attack on Venutius's line. Ninety four ballista was just over one and a half times the total complement of artillery in a full Roman legion. Lucius conception of a full battle plan against an army organised in the Roman style was based on fielding three cohorts of

infantry, three of heavy cavalry and ten centuries of mobile ballista - reducing this latter arm if the ground was unsuitable - to oppose a full legion and its auxilliary cavalry. Windubron wargames reflected this plan.

"Any casualties amongst the cavalry?" Each of the commanders shook their heads in turn; it had not been a difficult passage for the cavalry, the speed of the force had been limited by the ballista. "Good. Make sure that each man," he turned to the ballista centurions, "this goes for your men too - draws three sets of shackles from the pack horse lines. And make sure that they know how to use them, two captives left ankle to left ankle (or the other way round if they like). That way we can immobilise them very swiftly." The shackles were to Duor's design, with a spring lock that could only be opened with a special steel spike.

Carefully Caionac checked through each detail - he had the time and he was intent upon the next day's operations going absolutely smoothly. Even as the thought crossed his mind he knew he was being overly optimistic - nothing ever went absolutely smoothly, he would be grateful if even half of it did.

"The twins will take their centuries to the southwest with a full century of ballista." A nod indicated Lugdumnos, "That's your century Lug. How you support the cavalry will have to wait until you and the twins have sight of the Brigantes, but it is probable that the ballista will be best used singly, roaming free and with only a general idea of what the cavalry is attempting. From what the scouts tell us, the ground around the Wrekin is not conducive to deploying artillery in batteries. You will need to judge the opportunity, take position, check the movements of the cavalry and then shoot long range." Caionac stopped abruptly, "I'd forgotten - there is a bank of large gravel behind us about two miles away, have it bagged for the ballista. Disabled Brigante are more valuable to us without a four pound bolt skewering a few of them together. Wider effect too."

Having done with that matter he turned back to the cavalry centurions. "Keep your eye on the ballista, there'll be twenty four of them rushing from point to point; if you give them sensible information they'll put the Brigante into a panic and make gathering captives easier. Change your mind and suddenly charge across a clear area about to be swept by their discharges and we could lose a lot of men."

The twins acknowledged the point. They were not brothers - there was no great similarity of features, Duff was short, plump with red hair and a very even temper. Bethan on the other hand, was a hand taller, fair haired and lean with hollow features and slightly protruding eyes - and a fiery temper. The other centurions were of the opinion that Bethan relied on Duff to haul him out of any trouble that his temper had got him into. It might well

have been true. In any event they were usually in each other's company whether drinking, singing, brawling or, as would soon be seen, in battle.

"The rest of the cavalry will hit the line in four places, one century of cavalry and eighteen ballista, with the same orders for deployment as Duff and Bethan." Caionac, bit his lip as he decided how to break the next piece of news. "I'm sorry Tazak, but that group opposite seems to have Venutius at its centre and I am taking command of your century - after we've added ten men from each of the other three and ten of the scouts. I want to make sure of him and as a personal matter." He managed to give a grin as he went on, "I've got the debacle at Windubro to live down - it's not a lack of confidence in your ability, believe me. We've all seen you fight."

"Mother Carla's ceiligh house was the latest." A burst of laughter greeted Duff's bellowed accusation and Tazak's scowl of disappointment softened a little.

"Primus?" Lanagon leant forward as the laughter ended.

"Yes?"

"If we have so much time, shouldn't we warn the Cornovii?" He could clearly imagine the scene tomorrow at first light as Venutius launched his series of attacks and began driving captives and cattle to the west and north. "They'll lose a lot of people, not as captives, but dead."

The ring of young officers was solemn now, they had all had personal experience of what a tribal cattle raid left in its' wake, those had all been minor affairs on the outskirts of the associate settlements. Allied closely enough for Windubro to send cavalry for aid, but not for Windubro to supply materials for new housing or render any other aid than attempting to recover the booty the raiders had taken and restore it to the owners. This was to be a far bigger affair, stretching over twenty miles. It would not be a quick raid with the Brigante getting away too swiftly for the settlements to reorganise and follow. Venutius's army could not travel quickly and would, therefore, seek out as many warriors as they could and kill or bind them for slaves.

"The Lord Lucius sent brief, but clear instructions," Caionac was aware of what would be happening tomorrow morning up and down the line of the drive - and he did not like the thought of it any more than they did. He reached into the pocket belted around his tunic. None of them had put on armour and were dressed in regulation tunic and treads.

A piece of squared off velum, much scraped for economy, rewarded his search. The message was brief - it had taken half an hour to despatch, but that was because half of it had to be spelled letter by letter. There were no code groups set up for this sort of message.

" 'To Caionac. Do not begin operation before the Cornovii have been attacked. Lord Lucius,' "

He read, "Our general makes his wishes quite clear - we do not make any move against the Brigante until they have begun their drive - and if we think about it, the reason is simple enough

"As soon as we warned the Cornovii, the whole scheme would be betrayed. Our presence would be revealed .. Imagine what happens. A small group ride into the settlement at the Wrekin, for instance. It has to be a group for safety and they have to be impressive to convince the Cornovii that their message is to be taken seriously. Such a group would be seen by the Brigante who must have the tribe under surveillance. If we tried to sneak a single man in unseen, his behaviour would be considered by the Cornovii to be that of a spy - they'd kill him first and then wonder at his presence later. We would have a hard job persuading them that there was a threat from the Brigante, because Venutius would be most likely to melt away quietly - he doesn't desire another bloody nose." That was greeted with a laugh by the centurions who were listening intently and, so far, restraining themselves from interrupting.

"If we wait until the attack is launched, we have no need to prove the threat, smoke, flames, milling livestock and dying warriors will have persuaded them of that. The Brigante will be fighting, herding cattle and sheep, pinioning captives - and, if they can find the mead, drinking." Caionac's lips twisted ironically, "I'd sooner come unexpected on an enemy when he has a cattle goad in one hand and a jug in the other ... And that is what we will be doing. The surprise won't last all that long, but we know where we are, and amidst the clouds of smoke we will also know where they are. I don't think we will have much difficulty, to a man blinded by smoke the sounds of his mates attacking the Cornovii are the same as those his mates make when attacked by us!

"There is another reason for delaying contact. The Cornovii will be much more grateful after they have tasted fear than they would be for a warning - which may or may not be believed." The scene had been clear in his mind as he talked and the drama had transferred to his small audience - there was no doubt that they understood the business that lay ahead of them. At that moment a signalmen ran up and waited to catch the primus's attention.

"Yes?"

"A new message, primus - by the semaphore," and he handed another of the squares of treated sheep skin to Caionac.

"Lord Lucius, is showing great confidence in us, listen, 'You may offer an alliance and help from Windubro. Houses, grain, manpower. Persuade at least a score to travel to town as envoys. First level visitor's accommodation is set aside.' Gentlemen I think it is clear that Lord Gregory and Lord Lucius are expecting more than gratitude from the Cornovii. Let us do our best to ensure that all goes well tomorrow. Need I say that what we have discussed here is confidential - which is why we sit out in the open with no possible concealment within earshot - in particular the Cornovii must never learn that we held back; we simply arrived in the nick of time - just."

Cantodunon that morning

There were six people sitting around the small council table. They were in fact what Gregory thought of as the 'Great Council', but it would be ridiculous to refer to the piece of furniture as the Great Table - there was scant room for the six around it. Gregory drew on a small group of citizens for the Great Council, depending on which of the two towns he was in and what his purpose was. On this occasion he was looking for guidance on the means to secure loyalty from the Cornovii, both as citizens and military recruits.

Myrcal had bowed out of the meeting (she did not consider that it needed her presence as well as her husband), and there were four Britons in attendance. Brioc the archdruid (chief priest to the towns) He was thirty three years old, broad shouldered, but not tall in proportion - if one should imagine a short, solid wall, as long as its height - and throw in a ponderous manner, one would have a very good likeness.

Daffyd was a merchant, rubicund, well-built and booming - a trait that Gregory supposed he must have picked up when captaining his own ship. Not that Daffyd sailed his own ships now, he had bought one of the stone built mansions from the town and divided his time between that and a large Celtic style house in Beturos, the Parisii trading town on the Abos. His house in Cantodunon was next to Brioc's. The two remaining worthies were Huw an ironmaster who had become a citizen two years ago and Kierha, a female merchant also from Beturos. The term 'female' was more appropriate to Kierha than feminine, blocky, just as booming as Daffyd and possessing a bust that could do as much

damage as the shields of a legion's front line, she was still a very maternal person. The ironmaster was a very different type, as tall as Lucius, but slightly stooped and even deeper in the chest, he had been a very dour man when Gregory first came across him tending his charcoal with his son Roald in the hills behind Cantodunon. Huw had been living a solitary life after the death of his wife, making his charcoal and leaching the iron ore in the winter, tending his furnace in the spring and summer. Persuaded to come into the town he had adapted surprisingly fast, rapidly shed his taciturnity, married Meg, a plump little woman from the coastal Coritanni and produced twins girls.

Huw's skill as an ironmaker had rapidly brought him the title, 'Ironmaster of Cantodunon'. The first sight of Gregory's watermills had stirred a deep wellspring of ingenuity and now his team of twenty men produced a steady stream of iron products that Cantodunon exported to Gaul and which had, in a matter of only a year, given him a great store of silver. Stone mansions did not appeal to him, "Cold" was his terse response to the suggestion that he should buy one of the merchant's houses on the Via Principalis and he had his house built from board on a site overlooking the river. Here the rambling building with terraces and a small dock, gave him oversight of the river traffic and an end-on view of the iron bloomery and forges. Since the prevailing wind blew from the workshops to his house, he could tell with a sniff whether they were working or not. He could deduce a great deal from the odors that came through his window in the early morning.

There was no great chair this time, Gregory and Lucius sat at the same level as the Britons, who waited now for their lord to speak.

"There is a matter that arose earlier this morning when I pointed out to Donuil why we should be interested in what becomes of the Cornovii and why our cavalry and the mobiles have gone to their assistance." A smile creased his cheeks briefly, "In fact there are several questions that I have to settle.

"This is nothing that we will finalise today - or tomorrow. I want you to think about what I have to say, discuss it only amongst yourselves and then when we meet again in .." His eyebrows signalled the question, "three days time? .. You will give me your advice."

He clasped his hands together on the table in front of him and as his gaze slowly circled the table, continued, "Firstly, we must have a name for our new state - or kingdom. Windubro and Cantodunon are the names of the two towns and we will shortly have another - and several settlements." Gregory let them digest that before he said, "Secondly, there is the matter of citizenship and loyalty." Turning in his seat he addressed the druid directly, "Brioc, this is a field where you have greatest knowledge. Our growth in the next

few years is going to be astonishing - it has to be. There are increasing rumours coming from Gaul about an invasion of Britain. Apparently the magnates would like another massive expenditure by the State on a martial adventure - they've had no great military outpouring for some years now. An invasion of this island would require the use and support of several legions and allae of auxiliaries. Tens of thousands of men, thousands of horses, hundreds of thousands of pilum, millions of rations and so on And ships, of course."

Their attention was riveted on him completely, "A great deal of money ... fortunes to be made or expanded, military and civil service reputations to make or enhance. Yes! There is agitation from very influential people for an invasion and I expect that eventually it will happen - there is a momentum to these things, if enough people put their shoulders behind it a war trundles into view almost inevitably. I believe that the momentum has been supplied, but it will take some years before the invasion is inevitable. We must be stronger than we are now, we must control a greater part of this country than we do now and we must be sure that we grasp every advantage that is available to us.

"You've seen how our commerce has expanded, our production of grain, iron goods, cut board and many other items has grown from nothing to be a substantial force - and commerce is a force, my friends. Since Heron joined me two years ago, he has made a number of very useful innovations, but the remarkable thing is that he seems to have sparked an inventive spirit in a lot of our native citizens. At the moment I could point to a dozen ideas that promise well. Of course the possession of waterpower suggested some of these things - such as the fulling mill, the treatment of sheepskin to produce parchment, but the single handed steel crossbow for the light cavalry was not obvious (and I didn't think it would be powerful enough). All these things are our strengths and we must multiply them. - Which we cannot do without a much larger population than at present."

For a moment Gregory paused, allowing them to assimilate his first points before he went on to the more difficult part, "The upper reaches of the Dove and the Trent are, I am informed, eminently suitable for watermills, there is lead, iron and limestone ready for mining or quarrying - a great deal of manufacturing potential for which we need a greater population. Above all we want a loyal population as I've already pointed out.

"Although, the land can be ruled by one man, it cannot be governed by one man. We need a form of governance much more sophisticated than the town council meetings - or at least we will do when the new town is built and the population has increased two or three fold. Brioc, Kierha and Daffyd, you all know Gaul and must have some idea of how Rome rules its provinces. We need to build our own form of government here, a form that allows

citizens to have a say in what they do and what can be asked of them. - I am not abdicating in any way. Lord Lucius and I will still be the ultimate rulers, but the citizens must feel that they have a real effect on what the State does. Our present elections must be made less informal, they must be kept free of the corruption that Rome is famous for and they must give just enough power to the ordinary man .."

Kierha had remained silent too long and burst out, "And women."

His smile was genuine, "Yes, Kierha. And women. ... Just enough power to make them happy. We need a population that works, not a Roman mob that is kept quiet with rations and circus displays and must rely on slaves for much of their manufacture and agriculture."

He had not finished, but he was very happy at what he saw in the faces of his Great Council, they were mixed emotions, surprise, a little doubt, a little fear for the future, but amongst it all he felt that, as he met each eye, there was a belief that the great dream of a powerful Windubron state was at least possible - and desirable. "The new town is intended to be built without walls, Lord Lucius and I both felt that we needed a less martial town, unconstrained by walls for the capital of our state - whatever we decide to call it. Windubro and Cantodunon will become military forts with workshops and docks. Between them they are large enough to house two full infantry legions and six cohorts each of heavy cavalry and mobiles. The light infantry with their hand held ballistas, will be deployed and maintained in a more diffuse manner.

"Mills and factories will continue to spread along the river and we will need an increased number of defensible signal posts with the new large semaphore. I would like your suggestions for names for the new town and our State." There was a long pause as he studied the expressions of his chief councillors and then he said, "I'm not going to ask you for comments right now. Think on what I've said. We meet three days from now at noon. Good day friends." On that somewhat abrupt note Gregory rose from the table, gave a nod to the councillors - and he and Lucius left the room for the private quarters. The four remaining looked surprised.

"That was a little brusque wasn't it Gregory?" Lucius was puzzled, his friend was usually more sensitive to the sensibilities of others - to an extent that Lucius often disapproved of. His behaviour in the Council room just a moment before was completely out of character.

The lean features and out-thrusting nose that had given him the nickname of 'The Crane' (albeit out of his presence), swivelled to face the soldier directly, "You think so?" One hand reached out to clasp Lucius's forearm. "The last thing I wanted was for any discussion to begin while I was still there. I want them to come forward in three day's time with thoughts

that are their's alone - whether I agree with them or not, whether I allow them to influence our decisions .."

"Your decisions, my friend. This is politics not a military matter - little to do with me."

" ... Or not." Gregory became a little pensive, "It's early days yet, but what I said about Rome looking our way is true. Our politics, our method of governing these Britons, may very well have an effect on our military strength. We have the equivalent of half a legion under arms, if we double that number by the end of this year ..." He was interrupted again as Lucius reacted.

"Double it! Five thousand men?"

"And several hundred boys on Brigante ponies for light cavalry skirmishers and messengers."

Lucius swung through the nearest door into a small semi-public room that was used informally to receive messengers, reports and any minor matters that in the Roman legion would have been dealt with in the Praesideum by a senior military clerk. "Let's sit down and discuss this again - and order up a jug of the light mead will you, please? I think I am going to need sustenance."

Gregor raised his eyebrows and followed him into the room, pausing only to give an order to one of the servants that was always within call. "This is what we spoke of after the general council meeting, Lucius."

Shaking his head slowly and looking more like a dishevelled bear than ever, Lucius denied it, "Oh no we didn't! All you talked about was that we had a great opportunity to make the Cornovii very grateful to us."

"Well, my old friend, you know how my mind works by now. Did you think that I would not take it further, extrapolate a little?"

"A little? You have us doubling our legion in less than six months - and no doubt the civilian population the same?"

"Perhaps I'm wrong," The smile that suddenly softened his face was an apology of sorts for not taking more care to apprise Lucius of his 'extrapolations', "but I don't think so. The Cornovii may be spread about over the hills and valleys (as you put it, they are a diffuse

tribe), but from notes on the great map in the war room and scouts' reports in the Principia there must be several hundred small settlements of between fifty and two hundred men and women, in this region. Don't forget that there are the southern Cornovii that attempted a raid of their own on Ratas three years ago. In total that is a sizable population and one that appears to have grown greatly since the last really large cattle raid fifty years ago. They dispersed then according to Brioc, and despite their population growth the only place where they congregate in any numbers now is at the Wrekin - a long way from the Brigante .. until now of course. After that last raid they sought safety in dispersal. After we have saved them from Venutius there will be a different road to safety offered them."

He leaned forward to Lucius, an intent expression on his face, "Do you think they number as many as fifty thousand?"

The question took his friend by surprise, "Erm. Possibly. Gregory I've never gone to the trouble of correlating all the information we have on that part of the country, but I would guess that there is that sort of number in the area that Venutius is assaulting right now."

"No not now, tomorrow morning. I have a signal from Caionac."

"Well thank you! May I remind you that the only important responsibility I have is that of running the army? I like to be kept informed."

"I've just informed you Lucius - and the signal is lying on the reception table in your apartment, upstairs, ready for you as soon as you return."

Gregory thrust Lucius's brief huff to one side, "Fifty thousand men and women and few of the men will be spoiled by the warrior ethic. Don't you think you can recruit half a legion from them? We have cut board in plenty to build housing, manpower to build six or seven cohort sized fortresses, for protection, recruiting and training. Since more watermills have been used for blowing engines our production of concrete is far in excess of what we need right now."

His general had settled back in the chair, leaning his head back and obviously painting imaginary pictures on the ceiling, "I believe the Severn will prove to be navigable, Myrcal will be pleased."

It was Gregory's turn to be puzzled, "Eh?"

"Then we and the Parisii will have access to the tin trade and the merchants will pay us to build and maintain a road from Windubro to the Severn. A road along the southern flank of

the territory you are looking to acquire. One fortress on the Wrekin to act as a customs post as well, road spurs up to strategic places for the other fortresses, probably no more than one hundred and fifty miles of roads altogether and tying in nicely to our present road and signals system."

Getting to his feet again, he smiled a little self consciously, "I dream too Gregory. If Caionac performs well tomorrow we might expect a year, even two years of peace to consolidate that part of the country."

"You can count on it, Lucius. As a matter of interest, I have hired twelve engineers from Gaul, half of them time served legion engineers - and I have contacts that might result in us hiring a team of government clerks and administrators - there has been a tightening of the Imperial money belt recently, particularly in the more settled parts of Gaul. Do you think we should increase the size of the Principia to allow for an army of three legions in the next four years?"

"Three! Gods man, six years ago we had a band of fifty half trained youths, now you look for an army of fifteen thousand or so in a few years time." He shambled out of the door shaking his head ponderously, "Yes, yes. If nothing else it will save me from the task of training young officers in military organisation and methods - the administrators can do that - I've got months of surveying to do."

"Good luck to your planning Lucius."

"And the same to you, brother." It was true, they were in a sense brothers, Gregory reminded himself, his father had not formally adopted Lucius, but he had fostered his career as he would have done for a second son. He shook himself and headed off along the corridor to the stairway that led from the atrium to his private quarters, as Lucius had remarked he had a deal of planning to do himself - and then he must deal with whatever suggestions came to him from the council three days hence. He was looking forward to it.

Chapter four

The exterior of Brioc's mansion was very Roman, as were all the stone and concrete buildings along the via Principalis. There were six large mansions opposite the Praesidium and Principia, more than sixty large houses for visiting dignitaries, senior officers and the leading men and women of the town, and seventy odd for junior officers. That at least was the plan, only the major buildings and about half the rest of the town accommodation was completed yet - there was no point to building more with a population of just over five thousand in a space constructed for almost eight.

The wooden columns that formed the supports for the portico were of painted timber, oak trunks that had been left with their bark and then been coated with an oak coloured paint that contained a myriad of glistening pieces of gold foil. Winding about them, ivy vines climbed to the top where carved capitals of mistletoe pressed close to the underside of the pediment. It was a uniquely druidic variation of the classic portico - sprung from the mind of one of Brioc's neophytes. Inside there was just one mosaic in the wide hall that ran parallel to the house frontage. The other floors were tiled or concreted, with a generous scattering of animal skins, that the druid felt made the place feel warmer. A banquetting room, tiled in buff, red and black was innocent of skins, the yellow and red ochre painted walls decorated with a dado, had four massive painted panels of woodland scenes that incorporated oak spirits, water sprites, a winged horse quietly drinking at a pool - and an oval framed image of Sucellos the town's protector.

The furniture was sparse and consisted mainly of stools and small tables with a scattering of cushioned, armed chairs; more sophisticated furniture could be seen in one or two of the other mansions, but Brioc had no inclination to spend his gold and silver on Gallic imports that he was sure would have made him feel uncomfortable. Altogether there were three large reception rooms on the ground floor, one of which served for druidic celebrations, worship and teaching, a small study, kitchens and a small heated bath. With the exception of the State House, servants did not live in, they had their own homes and after the duties of the day were complete, Brioc was free of them. He could not imagine it any other way. In Gaul, he knew a man in a position of importance and wealth would have servants and slaves - they served his food, washed his feet, brought papers to him. A man was never alone. They were a sign of affluence, but they were also an incumbrance to any sort of private life. Even employed servants (paid by the town) were occasionally a nuisance to a man who, until five years ago, had lived in a large, but typical Celtic round house.

He had to admit though, that this living was very comfortable, he was warm in winter, the main rooms heated by a hypocaust, and cool in the summer and at the centre of his house was a square of sheltered garden with an apple tree, mistletoe and a statue of Sucullos and a small fountain (although more like an artificial spring), that rattled over the rocks at the foot of the statue and disappeared into covered irrigation channels that watered the grass and bushes. The second floor was built of cut board, a double wall stuffed with straw and shuttered, unglazed windows, here were the bedrooms of himself, his students and his leman Bettis.

Brioc had never married, never felt the need to, but over the years he had had three lemen, lovers who looked after his domestic life in an informal manner. Two had given him sons, not Bettis although she had been with him longest, nearly four years now - and he felt that there was no reason to find another. There was no lack of personable women for the post, but little Bettis, with her dark sparkling eyes and bustling manner supplied all he wanted of a woman - he might even marry in a year or two.

There was one more room on this second floor, a square office with all the impedimenta that the function required, shelves for scrolls, wax tablets and folios of parchment, three comfortable chairs with arms, a couple of tables and a couch. In the corner stood his harp, an old instrument passed down from his father who had travelled the land as a bardoi, taking a fair share in populating it. Standing hip high, its wooden frame and sound box, painted and gilded with fanciful, animalistic designs, it was a handsome instrument and Brioc kept it well, playing it usually for his own entertainment -, but on occasion in one of the ceiligh houses of Cantodunon and Windubro. Brioc took his duties as chief druid to the new towns and settlements seriously, the prophecies attached to their birth and ultimate destiny never far from his mind and often lauded by him at the various ceremonies he was responsible for.

This latest meeting with Gregory had surprised him, the manner of its ending had surprised him still further, but he had soon realised that the ruler of the two towns really did wish his chief councillors to tackle the questions that had arisen, without prior reference to him. It was their advice he wanted, totally unshaded by prior comment of discussion by or with him. Although Gregory clearly had no intention of allowing the council to rule him, he just as clearly had a great deal of confidence in them and wanted their own unexpurgated views. One thing had impressed itself on his brain after his first, slightly chaotic thoughts, was that he needed to consult with Medoc. Reputedly the oldest man in Britain, Medoc was the unchallenged head of the druidic college. Rarely leaving his home, he managed to communicate with other druids very efficiently by means of their own messengers and some other means - that could only be described as dreaming.

Although it was not precisely that. Medoc had trained a group of adepts who were spread about the major settlements and the two towns of course and, as the rare man or woman appeared who had the gift, continued to train more. The medium was limited and seemed to be capable of transmitting emotions with an occasional, explicit picture. Despite that limitation it proved a useful tool and the influence of the druids had grown under Medoc's 'rule'.

Brioc had an adept living in his home, pursuing duties as a bardoi within the town, but conveniently placed for just such an occasion as this. He rang for a servant and gave instructions to find Shawnu and send him to the office as soon as possible, while he waited Brioc spent some time thinking what form the message should take. Given the limitations it was very important not to try to transmit it in a way that attempted to convey too much information. It was something he had had much practice in and a minute or two's thought solved the problem as well as it could be solved. It was mainly Gregory's request to seek an appropriate name that Medoc was likely to be able to address, the other matters might be conveyed in some fashion or they might simply be incapable of finding their way to the old druid by this esoteric means.

He put it to Shawnu when the young man appeared, his lanky frame not at all fleshed out by the loose robe that covered him from the shoulders down, "I wish you to consider Windubro, Cantodunon and the line of settlements along the banks of the Trent. It must be a clear picture, but you will have a feeling of lacking something - a means of identifying the land. It will be there in front of your mind and yet you cannot find a name for it. What is this land to be called?

"Do you understand? Can you feel the puzzlement; the need to have a name?"

"Yes master." The lean features, incongruous in one barely out of boyhood, tensed in concentration, "Shall I light the brazier in here?"

Brioc shook his head quickly, the effects of the fumes at secondhand had affected him strongly and unpleasantly last time. His mind was altogether too set in the normal paths to wander readily into areas which should only be traversed by the elastic mind of a youth still open to the fantastic and fey. "No Shawnu, have one of the others accompany you as usual and burn the herbs in the leisure room." It was always necessary to have the seer accompanied when he or she wandered off in their mind - the body could decide to wander too, without any guiding intelligence.

The seer nodded solemnly and left the room. Brioc settled himself on the balcony and gazed over the town to the far bank of the river. There were fields of wheat there and

grazing for four hundred horses, a restful sight and a remembrance of the gifts the goddess Epona had bestowed. His eyes slowly closed. Where were they going? This small collection of tribes linked into a CelticRomana state in the middle of a wholly Celtic land. Was the prophesy a true one? Did glory wait on the descendants of Windubro, Cantodunon and all the new settlements between?

Their population was to grow Lord Gregory declared. Well that was obvious - it could only grow or stultify and shrink. What did he want of his councillors? His manner had been brusque in a way that Brioc could not remember having experienced before. Why? The Crane was a much less emotional man than Lord Lucius, he never did anything unconsidered - or at least not to Brioc's knowledge. So his manner was a deliberate thing, a ploy of some sort. One thing was certain and that was that he wanted his councillors to meet, to think, to talk - possibly talk to others - and then be ready for the meeting in three days time. Young Shawnu should be done in a half hour or so; he could take a meal and rest before entering the drugged sleep that was needed to receive the answer. How did Medoc manage the business? Brioc wondered. He surely did not have rooms full of sleeping adepts all ready on the off-chance that a message was on its' way? Brioc had to admit that he was not totally comfortable with some areas of Druidic lore. His strength lay in his care for the people in his charge, advising, guiding, comforting - and chastising. "And I'm good at it too." And realised he had spoken aloud, thanks be to Sucellos that he was alone.

And then he looked over the handrail to meet the eyes of an astonished soldier passing by on his way to the Principia.

Brioc muttered something obscene and quite uncharacteristic beneath his breath, settled back in his chair and dozed off in the sunlight. There was a miniscule smile on his lips.

Chapter five

Venutius was well pleased; the weather was fine, last night's downpour had been short lived, the light soil had drained well and the rising sun was a very clear signal for his army in launching their attacks on the Cornovii. Once it came clear of the horizon (some of his detachments would have to guess at the horizon, but that was of small importance - it would make a difference of minutes only), he took his own unit of almost five hundred men along the paths they had already reconnoitered. The settlements, herds and flocks that were their particular target lay within and around a group of small hills four miles away. One mile from the nearest huts and paddocks the men spread out until there was a space of four or five paces between one man and the next and the line stretched for more than a mile.

Their pace picked up now, the mixture of mounted and unmounted men trotting together at a speed that brought them upon the quarry in less than a quarter of an hour. The scattered whoops and hunting cries as they leapt the hurdles, brought a sudden flurry of movement in the scattering of huts. Men, women and children ran from the huts, shocked herdsmen appeared from out of low lying windbreaks that had sheltered them through the night and after a brief glance at the line of armed men hurtling down on them, took to their heels. There were few that outran the Brigantes. Shepherd and cowmen had no need to run in their normal lives, cattle would scatter if they did, Brigante warriors spent their lives trotting up and down the fells of the central and northern hill country. They fell on the breathless Cornovii, bound them quickly and plunged on for more captives, whilst the wings of the long line of warriors sped on to the rest of the settlements in that section - where the scene was played over and over. Within an hour Venutius's five hundred men had captured three hundred Cornovii, killed a score of the fitter men who had tried to resist and suffered one casualty - a broken ankle, from leaping over a hillock into an aged, dead sheep on the other side. The unfortunate man had to tend his ankle himself - no-one would come close to him!

At a rough estimate Venutius, reckoned that the cattle within his sight numbered at least the same as the human captives, flocks of sheep had scattered in alarm, but were being driven into the bowl of the hills. "A thousand of those?" He wondered and then, after ordering one in ten men to stay with the captives and animals, took the rest deeper into Cornovii territory. They were out of sight within half an hour. Brendon was busy organising his fifty men into a secure guard for the booty; the Cornovii were bound, (but it had been done hastily) and not only must their bindings be checked, but the cattle and sheep had to be gathered together and started on the road to Brigante country. It kept them all busy, too busy. He had just paused from herding a bunch of skinny looking hill cattle through a gap

in a stone wall, wiping sweat from his forehead, when another hand reached over his shoulder and solicitously assisted the mopping.

"Hot isn't it?" There was an uncomfortably sharp pressure between his shoulder blades; he knew what that was. He didn't need to recognise the non-Brigantean dialect to realise that he was no longer amongst friends and comrades. Carefully he held his sword out to one side, dropped it on the floor and looked about him. Scores of warriors on horses or leading horses had materialised out of the ground apparently. Clad in bright steel cuirasses, round helmets with brow and cheek guards, and armour on arms, thighs and legs they were not men to take lightly. Apart from a brief scuffle or two with hardened warriors who would rather die than surrender, his whole group was swiftly captured. The situation had reversed itself thoroughly in a very short time. The Cornovii were having their bonds cut and the Brigante were being shackled with iron, right ankle to right ankle. Brendon acknowledged the device as being both effective and economical, and scowled into the face of the man who shared his shackle. Their hands were free, but unless someone was foolhardy enough to get within arm's reach the Brigante were helpless.

Cainoac did not need to leave men with the captives, while the Windubrons collected a reasonable bounty of bronze and a few gold torcs and other warrior embellishments, he took the time to speak to the Cornovii. It was an emotional scene, the Cornovii had been looking into a future of rape and slavery, with no hope of ever escaping it. The Brigante were not known to be tender with their slaves. Now they were free, these mounted strangers in shining steel had swept into the Brigantes and with no loss to themselves, totally defeated them. The primus searched about until a spokesman was found amongst them - which took some time for, quite naturally, the Cornovii were frantically locating the members of their families, trying to survey the flocks and herds and identify the contents of their homes from amongst the piles of booty the Brigante had slund into two farm carts. The people demonstrated their gratitude in a very positive fashion, but that did not curb their anxiety and the mixture of emotions produced a chaos of running and hunting and embracing and calling of names, that made finding the chief man difficult.

He was heavily bearded, a stoop shouldered, weathered old man of about sixty, profuse in his thanks, but clinging to the shoulders of two small boys, his grandchildren - or great grandchildren Caionac surmised. The chief man was old enough for that.

"Sir, we must hurry after the Brigante. They will carry their raid onto the next settlements and if we are to prevent a tragedy for your people, we have to catch up with them."

"Oh yes. Oh yes indeed." he nodded his grey head vigorously, "Granta and his people have their herds just five miles away, just over there." His finger pointed to the west, "but nearer than that is a village of ten or twelve houses, to the south of us."

"Well, I guess they've already been plundered, sir."

"Already, but those men came upon us with the dawn, do you say that they attacked our neighbours in the dark?"

"Oh no." Pausing for a moment Caionac drew a small wax tablet and stylus from the pocket slung at his waist, "May I have your name sir? We must hurry on."

With a hint of surprise that this young man should not know his name the man said, "Klemen it is - I have been headman these last twenty years."

"Your pardon Klemen....." He made his notes and then explained, "This is only one part of a huge raid that the Brigante are making. If we had not interfered Venutius planned to take most of the Cornovii into slavery and drive their flocks and cattle into Brigantea. He has an army of thousands sweeping through the country .."

"Thousands!" The man was shocked, "But what when you have gone? Will they not fall upon us again?"

Caionac's smile was wolfish. "Have no fear there Klemen, we have a lot of work before us and we need to catch up with the raiders, there are hundreds of us pursuing the line of Venutius's men from the Wrekin to the banks of the Trent."

The old man was gaping now, trying to imagine the scope of the raid and clearly seeing the disaster that had faced the Cornovii. The primus continued, "I must be going." The Windubrons had finished the task of shackling the captives and reassuring the erstwhile victims and were forming their line of march, cavalry to the front, ballista in two groups, one to each side and somewhat behind the cavalry troops.

He swung up into the saddle and leant down to give one last piece of information, "We are from Windubro. Do not harm the captives, we intend to sell them in Gaul and damaged men go cheaply - we will share the proceeds with you. In the meantime, is there anything you can set fire to? The Brigante will be expecting to see smoke behind them and will get worried if there is none."

"Indeed yes. Yes we will do that." Narrowed dark eyes looked up into the primus's face, "Share did you say?"

"Yes Klemen, we'll be coming back this way with the rest of the raiding party, we'll pick these men up then."

The old head shook slowly in wonder, the Cornovii were not used to any sort of consideration from other tribes, "Now there's a wonder."

"And our king will want to meet the headmen of the Cornovii."

Sudden suspicion clouded the man's face, "Oh! Why would that be then?"

Caionac tried to make his smile reassuring, but framed in the clasp of the steel helmet and cheek guards it was not very successful, "Don't worry. We mean you no harm. ..., but think on this. In a year or two the Brigante may well be back. Will we be here then? Would you want our help then?"

"Now, I am on my way. Sucellos guard you 'til we return."

He spun his horse around and galloped off after his men, leaving Klemen standing in his dust, more than a little bemused.

The battle at the Wrekin was very different, in the first place the Brigantes had not totally succeeded in surprising the settlement, their information was faulty and they mistook a small cluster of houses a mile from the major settlement, for the main one. Fugitives from the raided village fortified the alarm that had already been raised when the smell of smoke on the early morning breeze reached the small town. Wrekin had a population of just over two thousand scattered around it in a ring of settlements. The alarm spread rapidly, and men were soon streaming up the hillside from all sides, shepherding their women and children into the dubious shelter of the old earthworks. Venutius's thousand warriors kept a compact formation, not allowing time for the fugitives to establish their defence in more than a few spots. Since the defences were not manned completely, the areas of resistance found themselves surrounded in sections of the periphery of ring fortifications that had no provision for this situation. There was no protection from the warriors that had stormed through the earthworks and now came at them from behind.

The fighting lasted for about an hour, gradually dying out in a pathetic spate of bloody skirmishes amongst the great ring of earthen banks that formed the hill fort. There was no contest between the well armed and seasoned warriors and the brave, but totally inadequate resistance put up by men who spent their days amongst sheep and cattle.

The Windubrons watched from concealment in small woods to the east of the Wrekin, they were about fifteen hundred paces from the action having skirted the village that was attacked first. They had no possibility of getting closer while there was fighting on the hillside, as Lanagon had said, the ground was exposed and any movement towards the smoking settlements would have been seen almost instantly. They had just over two hundred men to mount an attack on the thousand Brigante, until the warriors were split up in looting, pinioning captives or simply enjoying themselves with the women, the Windubrons must remain out of sight.

As the fighting died down, groups of warriors and crowds of women and children came down from the Wrekin. Only a hundred or so of the Cornovii men had survived the fighting. Slowly the scene became organised, some warriors being given the job of gathering the men in one paddock and the women and children in another larger one, the rest spread amongst the settlements gathering more captives, emptying the houses of whatever seemed worthwhile - not that there was much to be gained from these impoverished people whose only wealth was their herds. Fires burst out amongst the little collections of houses, much to soon for some of the warriors who were still raping women indoors. There were great guffaws of laughter as the men staggered out with eyes streaming and dragging the women behind them and cheers of encouragement as, once clear of the smoke most of the men returned to their interrupted pleasure, forming little rings of men holding down a naked woman at their centre, spread wide and shrieking, while one after another changed places between her legs.

It was an occupation that seemed to have become standardised over the Brigante's years of plundering neighbours. The scenes of rape were almost identical, even to the number of men holding the woman down - eight of them, two men to each limb, drawing the victim taut between them so that she was held totally helpless and open for the active members of the rape. Pale bodies arched and quivered and then collapsed as the next male threw himself onto and into his screaming prize. After three such attacks, few of the women still had the strength to scream.

Duff, Bethan and Lugdumnos held back until the Brigante were totally involved in celebrating and consumating their victory. It was not easy, rape had never been a feature of Windubron life, and was punished severely and brutally when it happened. The treatment

meted out to the defeated Cornovii disgusted and enraged the young legionaries and it was only strict discipline that held them back from a premature assault. It was time at last, the mobiles setting off first. The battles had circled the Wrekin - a perimeter of at least three miles - and the ballista raced along it in opposite directions, stopping whenever a group of warriors presented a target and from a distance of three or four hundred yards shattering them with darts or the bags of stones that they had spent the previous night pitting into sharp edged fragments. Behind them charged the cavalry, running down startled warriors and using swords or the, butt-ends of lances to fell them for shackling. Each century had split into its ten troops of eight men. As six of the men laid into their prey the other two followed swiftly clamping the iron shackles about their ankles until warriors lay dead or writhing uselessly in pairs. Then the troop charged after the next group of warriors or retreated to circle any large threatening group, swooping to charge the men on the outskirts, cutting down or stunning small numbers before galloping out to form the circle again. The Brigante had no answer to this tactic, they could not bring their greater numbers to bear because the Windubron cavalry sped out of their reach and then, when they stood in defence, the deadly lances pierced their shields and plucked men away from the line.

It was past noon before the fighting died down and the Windubrons with their captives (the shackles exchanged for hobbles), began to assemble outside the first settlement that had been attacked. A group of possibly one hundred Brigante had fled north west before the Windubrons reached them and while they were still heavily engaged. That was all that had eluded them though, eight men of the cavalry and the three-man crew of one ballista were dead, on the other hand there were more than five hundred captives and very many dead Brigante. All good news for the Cornovii, of course., but even so small a loss for the Windubrons was felt bitterly.

The three centurions met with the chief men of the settlements and shared an impromptu meal with them. There were things to talk about.

Duff took the lead by common consent, "Men of Wrekin, by now you will have learned where we come from - what nation it was that rescued you."

"And we thank you most heartily young man." It was a big, beefy man who spoke, with the same weathered features as the others of this shepherd's town, but blue eyes and a slow smile that exposed a full set of strong white teeth - remarkable in a man of late middle age. Duff acknowledged the comment with a brief smile.

"As payment for our losses and the risks we took, we will take the Brigantean torcs and other gold and silver. The proceeds of the slave market will be split equally between Windubro and Wrekin and we will supply timber for housing and rations if needed, freely. I suggest that you keep their weapons and armour." It was a stunned silence that greeted his words, the Cornovii were deeply thankful that the Windubrons had come to their aid - in fact rescued them when there was no possibility of them doing anything for themselves., but ... they had fully expected to have to pay for it, a portion of their herds and flocks perhaps? Women to take away and breed new Windubrons? There must be something else.

There was, but it was as much a surprise as the rest of that day's events.

" At noon, the day after tomorrow, the leader of our small force wishes to meet with as many of the leaders of your people as possible. He has a proposition to put forward that we believe is beneficial to both the Cornovii and Windubro."

The headman queried, "There are more of you in Cornovii country?" There was a note of disapproval and suspicion and Duff reassured him quickly.

"No this is not an invasion by Windubro. Your settlements were not the only ones to be attacked by Brigantean slavers. Venutius had assembled an army of three thousand" The sudden outcry and lamentation was a measure of the fears that he had just aroused. Duff shook his head in self deprecation of his clumsiness. "Don't worry, we had to spread ourselves dangerously wide, but, as you see we caught up with them here and I don't doubt that the others have done the same between here and the Trent. They were four times our numbers, but there is no match for the Windubron army - had they been twice as great a host it would have made no difference - except that the booty would have been greater." There was a roar of laughter went up from his men and some from the Cornovii and he thought to himself that a little boasting did no harm at all.

Putting on a sober face once more the centurion made a wide gesture with his arm, taking in the whole of the land around the Wrekin, "It was Venutius's intention to entirely strip the lands of the Cornovii, taking its' men and women, the cattle, the sheep. To take all of Cornovii manhood and wealth and display it to the rest of the Brigante for a very simple - and somewhat stupid reason.

"He had just attacked our town with ten thousand and been soundly defeated. He lost seven thousand men of the Brigante. If he could have returned with your whole country in chains and driving its wealth before him he could have declared a glorious victory not an ingnomious defeat. You were to have been the means of his saving face. You would

have been the meat of his bardois' songs of praise and celebration. That will not happen now - he is probably dead, lying with his men in a field twenty miles or so from here."

"And how do you know that, my boy?"

"Oh we have no doubts on that score have we lads?" And the response was a very evident confirmation.

"I must not encroach far on what our primus has been given leave to talk to you about, what he can promise and what he may ask for, but I ask you to think on this. Do you believe that the Brigante will forget about you now? They are a proud people, getting short of grazing land and with a new generation of warriors eager to prove themselves in battle and win the spoils of war. They'll be back. Come to the meeting in a day's time. We will not steal from you, neither will we claim tribute for what has been given in generosity. We simply want to talk to you and show some of you the towns we have built on the Trent and the way we live - which is much more comfortably than you do here."

After a long pause and considerable discussion amongst his audience the beefy looking headman stepped forward and said, "We agree centurion - although I am not sure what that title means - we agree. We will meet your ... primus? .. At noon the day after tomorrow."

"Thank you, I will leave a couple of troopers to guide you, but the rest of us must start these, " he indicated the paddock where the captives were sitting dejectedly on the ground, "on their way to Windubro. May Sucelos guard you and may you prosper in the years to come."

The two centuries arranged a line of march that ensured control of the prisoners, reinforcing their own numbers by taking two men from each ballista team. It was more than enough, even for the three day journey that lay ahead of them. They left behind a scene of puzzled enthusiasm for the obscure future and, nearly twenty mile away now, a dishevelled and demoralised band of Brigante who expected at every moment to be slaughtered, kept up a pace that had already thinned their numbers by a half, and threatened to exhaust the remainder in another a mile or so.

Woolen cloth was becoming an important export for Windubro, their flocks of sheep produced a good, long staple wool that spun easily into yarn and gave a strong material when woven. Spinning and weaving were still heavily dependant upon labour, being a

hand operation entirely, but the tedious and very uncomfortable business of fulling the cloth after weaving by thrashing it in baths of water had been mechanised.

Gregory's new accountant, fresh from a Gallic ceramics factory, had applied himself to the problem of costing the fulling operation, and shown that the time and expense of building the water wheel and other machinery had been well rewarded. Fulling by hand required men or well built women to stand at a trough of water and beat the cloth with heavy wooden paddles until the wool had thickened and softened. Then of course it had to be wrung out and hung carefully for drying. It took as long to 'full' a piece of cloth four and a half feet wide and seven feet long, as it did to spin the yarn - which in turn was a far more time consuming task than weaving. Windubro's concerns were largely concentrated upon the amount of work that its citizens could handle, mechanical fulling reduced the hours spent on making woolen cloth. It did not actually increase the number of pieces that could be sold, for spinning was still a bottleneck and only an increased number of spinners - or a faster method could help there, but it left hands free for other labour.

Ian had charge of the fulling sheds, a middle aged Coritani who had been accepted for citizenship two years ago. He was a happy, roly-poly fellow. Apple cheeked, a decided paunch - and a popular singer at the ceiligh house. He was rapidly growing deaf and had taken to wrapping his head with a cloth to deaden the constant thumping of the machine driven paddles - it was too late to protect his ears, but it would, at least, preserve what remained of his hearing so that, provided his companions spoke loudly, he still enjoyed conversation. It had not affected his ability to sing with true pitch, thank Sucelos.

The machine did not require much in the way of supervision, he had four labourers to help load and unload the cloth, but that was at two hourly intervals. Between loading and unloading he had free time to walk along the riverbank or work in the little workshop he had made for himself. He had an idea for mechanically scraping sheepskin for writing material, using a roller and a blade. It had not produced a satisfactory piece of parchment yet, but that was because, part way into the project, he had suddenly realised that rollers could be used to squeeze things. Now the wet cloth in the fulling sheds had the water rolled out of them before hanging to dry. It saved damage from hanging whilst too wet and it speeded the process up too. Even better, he received one sesterce from the State coffers for every twenty pieces produced! He was making one hundred sesterces a month. In local terms that would make him a wealthy man in a year or two - if more fulling sheds were built it would happen quicker!

The move to seek citizenship had not been made because he was a poor, landless peasant. He had ten acres of his own, three cows, a few sheep grazing on hillside next to

his farm, pigs and chickens, a wife and three fine children. With hard work and the help of his oldest son, a lad of ten, they ate well, had goods to exchange for cloth, tools, salt and all the other necessities - and had a little left over for luxuries like wifely adornments and a riding pony. Ian was amongst the better off, not as comfortable as a member of a warrior family of course, but well above the level of three quarters of the population who worked all hours for their masters, and had no personal property or goods. Ian's house had been watertight, warm - and, he admitted freely, crowded. A twenty five foot diameter circle that encompassed his immediate family, two aunts, his mother and two sheepdogs. He would gladly have ejected his aunts and given the room to a pig, but daren't risk the affront to the Gods.

His first visit to the market at Windubro had been a revelation to him. The town walls were themselves a marvel, standing twenty feet above the two wide ditches that surrounded them. They were faced with turf, but above the turf the tops of serried ranks of great tree trunks showed that the turf was backed with real substance., but this awesome sight was not what he had come to see. The market was the first he had ever attended, a gathering of farmers, traders and Windubron citizens selling, bartering and buying all manner of things from root vegetables to lengths of linen cloth, iron sheathed ploughs to steel knives, simple wooden platters to enamelled jewellery. A large area outside the town was fenced and held an array of animal pens, chicken coops, benches and tables with goods offered for coin or barter. Ian had brought two piglets with him, for like almost all the men he had known until then he had no coin. The piglets were confined in a sack over his shoulder and were an uncomfortable load. He had expected to see something he wanted quite quickly and then enter into the lengthy bargaining that he was used to. It did not happen like that.

For a start, there was so much to see that he wandered from table to table, lured on by the goods on the next one along the row. He had no interest in more livestock and so spent no time at the pens. After at least an hour he found his way back to the dealer with the linen for sale, it was undyed, but smooth and soft, the woman behind the table was pleasant, but drove a hard bargain and he only received one and a half lengths for the two piglets. The process was really quite fast, she knew what she wanted and also, what she was prepared to give. After a few brief exchanges it was clear that she wanted the piglets and she made it equally plain that she would not give more than one and a half lengths of the imported cloth. The extended bargaining and associated chaffer that he had looked forward to so much never resulted, but something more did.

The woman was a citizen of Windubro, she had been one of the original settlers that built the walls and her name was Margit. A Coritani like himself they did strike up an

aquaintanceship despite the curtailed conversation. She was an interesting woman, plump and energetic, barely into her twenties and, judging from her exchanges with innumerable passers-by, well known to the town community.

"Would you like to see a little of the town." She asked after dealing with another customer who bought one of the piglets for silver.

Ian's eyes widened at the thought, "Yes. Yes indeed I would. Is it allowed then?" Looking across at the huge gatehouse that guarded the entry into Windubro.

"Oh yes., but leave you must before sunset. Only citizens and invited, important people may stay within the town overnight."

Ian's laughter was spontaneous, "No, no there's no importance to a man like me. Just a little farmer, but I would like to see the town."

"Well then." Looking at the few remaining goods on her table she decided, "Look. There's little more business I'll be doing today. Why don't I settle my debt with the market bailiff and then take you to see my house?"

It was agreed and after Margit had stood up on a stool she kept behind the table, and bawled her head off in a most surprising manner, a small man with a badge slung around his neck and a large leather bag at his waist, appeared.

"Oh, there you are at last Cumboll," I've been calling that long my throat's sore."

Cumboll's look expressed his disbelief, but wasted no time in counting up the goods on the table and checking them off against a list in his hand, "That's just fifteen denarius."

"Fifteen!" Margit's voice rose almost to a shriek of disbelief. "Fifteen?"

The little man blinked, sniffed once and then opined, "I could, maybe make it thirteen denarius"

The bargaining that followed was a great deal more energetic than Ian's experience a short time before, but it was terminated with satisfaction on both sides for twelve denarius. They parted with the exchange of the coins, a brisk handclasp and a smiling farewell from both parties.

"There. Now we can go." She led Ian through the gate while he cautiously eyed the stern looking guards in full armour, swords at their sides and two pilum clenched in the left hand. He had expected to see a clustering of round huts and cattle paddocks such as he had witnessed in the great hill fort at Letodunon, but it was nothing like that. Before him a wide road stretched to the other side of the town where he could see the inside of another gatehouse just like this one. Flanking the road were great buildings made of stone! Behind them rank upon rank of wooden houses arranged in squares with small gardens at the centre. His bemused gaze turned to Margit in wonderment.

"Yes," she said, "I live in one of those, two roads down to the left and then five across. Come I'll show you. My husband Gwillam (he's a shepherd you know), will most like be home now. If you like he'll take you to the men's bath house - there's plenty of time before sunset." And she bustled along with Ian keeping an even stride beside her. They passed squads of armoured men heading from the exercise ground to the Principia to report off-duty or prepare for night guard, groups of men and women all returning from their various work and since their work lay variously along the river bank in the iron works, docks and saw yards, or out in the fields to the west, south and east, or the forests to the south, the traffic passed in all directions. A population of some two thousand, home bound, cheerful or quarrelsome, cheerily or gloomily - a noisy chaos that Ian found totally confusing, but also exhilarating.

Margit and Gwillam's wooden house was twice the size of his own, and the walls were white washed inside and out so that it was very much lighter - and it was occupied by just the two of them and their children. There was a fireplace against a low stone wall at one end of the house, but it was cold now. Well above and out of the reach of any flames a wattled screen evidently guided the smoke to a louvred hole close to the roof. A small corner of the room contained beds for two children and light wooden screens were pulled across to shield them from the rest of the room - and provide privacy for Margit and Gwillam. He suddenly realised that he was spending so much time looking and comparing that he had not spared a word for his hosts. Ian apologised profusely.

"Nay man, that's no matter. We're proud of our home - and when I remember how we lived in the old town .."

"Camulodunon," Margit interjected.

Gwillam nodded dourly, "Camulodunon. We lived in Margit's father's house, with the rest of the family - fourteen of us, and our bed lay in front of the doorway. I don't think we ever got a full night's sleep, some one or other was always clambering over us - usually half

awake - to get out to the privy. This," he waved his hand about, "is all ours - and only ours. Man, it was like going to Avalon - 'cept we didn't have to die first."

"Oh, but the first months here were wicked hard Gwillam."

"Ay." And they proceeded to recount the whole of the long journey through the forests and then the terrible weeks of building the town walls. Time went on and although Ian was enjoying it, he had looked forward to the bath house ever since Margit had mentioned it and it began to look as though there would be no time.

"Your pardon, but .. You mentioned the bath house."

"Lugh forgive me - and here me and Gwillam rattle on." She turned round and stared forcefully up at her husband, "Gwillam, think you that your friend the Primus would give permission for Ian to stay overnight with us - and then after the baths we could walk along to the ceiligh house for supper and a song or two."

"And one of your stories, love?"

"Well.... It'll get us a free meal though, won't it? Off you go to the Principia and ask Dungan for permission, while I walk with Ian to the bath houses. I'll call Caley and her husband," She confided to Ian, "they live next door." Returning to her original instructions, "we'll meet you there and you three men can go into your baths and Caley and I will go to the women's."

There had not been time for Ian to reply to this invitation and swift implementation and now he attempted to offer his thanks.

"No, no. Not at all, at all. We're delighted to have a new face to show our friends. How many children have you?" And a brisk interrogation followed as they left the house and rattled the string of bells hung outside Caley's house.

Ian remembered that whole evening very clearly. It had made him determined to leave his village and seek entry to Windubro. He had sold his farm to his aunts accepting delayed payment in terms of a pig every twelve month for three years, and then they had driven two milk cows loaded with their few possessions to Windubro. His wife had not been at all pleased and he seemed to remember that the two youngest children cried all the way, but they stopped sulking and crying at the first sight of Windubro.

The satellite town outside Windubro, where non-citizens lived had been provided with decent housing by the time Ian and his family took up residence so that the twelve months that it took for him to be approved and made citizen were not too uncomfortable. Hard work in the fields, and his easy way with animals had earned him respect and his citizenship. More hard work and a latent mechanical aptitude had resulted in employment in the fulling sheds - a year of experience and some modest improvements that he had made before the drying rollers, had placed him in charge of the factory. Ian was a happy, fulfilled man -, but ... If only he could think of a way to speed up the spinning ...

It was time to stop the fulling paddles and move the cloth on to the rollers, he turned on his heel and strode back into the gloom of the sheds, whistling as he went.

The semaphores relayed the results of the expedition and the capture of seventeen hundred Brigante, but Venutius was not amongst them; neither had his body been found. It had to be presumed that he had escaped the cavalry - whether he would escape the wrath of Cartimandua was a different matter. Caionac reported that he had offered the Cornovi an alliance with Windubro and that he would be escorting twenty one headmen and women to talks there. Time of arrival estimated to be three days.

"So." Gregory read the parchment in his office. The glazed windows were open and the scent of new mown hay from the meadows down river was almost overpowering. Here, unseen by any of his subjects he lay back in his cushioned armchair and rested his feet on the table that bore his papers and writing materials, although these days he was more likely to employ two or three scribes rather than perform the duty himself - it was quicker. The meeting with his chief councillors was at noon today, when that was done, he and Lucius would set off for Windubro, along the Dobunos track. It was no longer a mere trackway, seventy miles of it had been paved with stone and two short spurs to Cantodunon in the north and Windubro in the south completed a ninety mile route with six staging posts. For two fit men travelling briskly, but without straining themselves, the whole journey would take two days, the semaphore would ensure that there were fresh horses at each fifteen mile stage and that a decent meal and bed would be ready halfway. For a messenger with despatches too complex for the signal system, it was less than a day, but his mounts would not be fit to ride for several days after.

"What have they made of it I wonder?" His thoughts had swung back to the meeting and his hopes of the quality of his councillors. He believed he had chosen well, but the meeting would show whether they were capable of the level of political astuteness that the two towns needed if they were to prosper beyond their present state of military and

commercial competence. There was more to the creation of a nation than simply building a strong army, industry and commerce. If there was not a system to create cohesion amongst the various tribes that would be the source of its manpower, it would eventually burst apart. Cohesion would depend upon a mantle of religion that accepted differences at the same time as it acknowledged a state religion, discipline (he had no doubts there), a political system that allowed sufficient freedom to satisfy the majority without giving rise to the vicious faction fighting that had been such a drain on the Roman Republic; commercial rewards that encouraged the participation of a maximum of the population, citizenship that would encourage and insist upon absolute loyalty to the state.

And they couldn't continue to call it the land of the two towns! Nor simply Windubro, that was too confusing, despite the example of Rome itself. A name, they must have a name; had the druids solved that one he wondered? "Well, only two hours to go. Let's see how well they've tackled the problems. I hope to God they've recognised that there is a problem."

The six men and women were sitting around the table again, the Lords of Windubro, Brioc, Kierha, Daffyd and Huw, and small tables with food and drink stood beside each of them. Gregory expected that the meeting would be longer than their last - not all that long though, he wanted to start off on the road to Windubro, but he needed to make some recompense for his calculated behaviour last time.

It had been noticed. The councillors smiled appreciatively, the State House cooks had a very good reputation amongst the town's people fortunate enough to dine there occasionally. It was Brioc who opened proceedings after the courtesies had been observed and the blessing of Sucellos had been called upon the meeting.

"Lords, you sent us away to think on the matters you had raised at the town meeting and the Grand Council that was held here afterwards. We discussed it almost immediately for - your pardon Lord - your manner was not at all your normal one. It seemed at first that we had offended in some way, but then as we considered both the dismissal of the Council and the problems you had touched upon we came to the conclusion that you wanted us to arrive at solutions, suggestions entirely without your influence." The usually austere druid gave an uncharacteristic grin, "We Celts are not totally naive in the ways of politics - and it was a political game that you were playing.

"There are uncomfortable decisions to be made for the two towns. Our way of life has become settled in the few short years since Windubro was founded. Our population is

relatively small, just over ten thousand all told. We all know most of the people we see about us, they are familiar, much like a large village. Now, you tell us that we are about to expand greatly - that indeed we must, if we are to prosper. That closeness will disappear. If the towns are to grow and yet avoid our citizens forming little local communities within the towns, jealous of their neighbours and centred only on their local loyalties and not the wellbeing of the state as a whole, we have to install a government, instill patriotism, weld disparate persons and gods together.

"You were intent on our seeing this for ourselves (that part was not difficult, Lord), in particular you needed us to make a preliminary decision for ourselves. The decision is that we will restructure our towns; under your rule we will adopt the measures that will be needed - and we will do this," The phantom grin was there again, "in the full knowledge that we have done it to ourselves." He sat down again and took a healthy pull at the flagon of watered wine.

Lucius sat amazed, Gregory had a somewhat self-satisfied expression, Brioc's little speech had been all that he had hoped for. The Council were sophisticated enough to realise that the upset and, probable unpleasantness, that would follow as they attempted to build a complex shell of laws, mores, and behaviour fit for a people who would eventually number hundreds of thousands, would sit more comfortably now that they had recognised the need for themselves.

"Thank you citizens. I am not intending to ask you to form a republic, despite my own father's opinion (which I still remember most clearly) I do not believe that a republic is a good thing. How Rome managed to avoid tearing itself apart in the years before Caesar and the Augustans I cannot imagine. Perhaps there was a special spark there that held all together despite anything the consuls and factions could do, but I would not care to take a chance on it. You heard me talk of the ambitions of the Roman magnates and the invasion of this land that will eventually follow. We must be strong when that happens, a strong and cohesive state.

"So. What are we to call our state? What did Medoc say, Brioc?" He laughed aloud at Brioc's expression, "What, did you think I did not know that the first thing you would do would be consult the archdruid - the oldest and wisest man in Britain? What has he to offer?"

"He has said that he will visit Windubro at the time that the Cornovii arrive there - and announce it then with appropriate ceremony."

Lucius took umbrage, "Announce it! Lord Gregory asked for his suggestions not a pronouncement."

But Gregory was not offended and soothed his friend, "No! Brioc and Medoc are absolutely right, this is a matter of religion and should be done that way. It will make a great impression on the Cornovii for one thing and the news of the event will redound to our benefit throughout these midland tribes. You four and two of the senior officers of the legion will travel by wagon, unless you prefer horseback, and join us at Windubro. The Lady Myrcal will assume charge of Cantodunon while we're away.

We have much to do in the coming months, I have recruited a team of freedmen, ex-civil servants from Lugdunum in Gaul to improve our procedures - quite frankly our civil offices have only a rudimentary organisation, good enough for a few thousand citizens with modest income and ambitions. They can distribute the citizen funds each quarter, keep control of the market, forecast the product of our grain and animal stock, administer food stores, but they are already having trouble with our manufacturies, exports and imports. The legionary offices, in fact the whole of the Principia has to be reorganised, we only have a few widows and disabled legionaries as yet and we are not likely to have any time-served legionaries of our own for a decade or two, but all these things will happen and the machinery to provide for and handle them must be set up now. Lord Lucius will organise the Principia, I will attend to the Civil organisation.

Now you clearly did not spend three days simply congratulating yourselves on discerning my intentions in setting this task. What else did you produce in the way of plans for our future?"

"We divided the task, Lord." Brioc did not rise this time, but simply indicated each of the others in turn. "It was suggested that the following plan be followed....." He turned back again to regard the Romans directly again, "In each case we expect to bring in others to assist us, there will in fact be a number of committees. Huw raised the matter of controlling the products of Windubro and Cantodunon. Not only actual production, but training, development of each trade, governing the rewards, importing new techniques and craftsmen. It was decided that each trade should be governed by a guild, with a set of laws and a guildmaster - and provision should be made for dividing a guild in the future if it develops too wide ranging a set of interests.

"Kierha pointed out that the shipping to and from the Trent is totally unregulated. There is a rudimentary customs post at the docks, but only two officials. Shipping is mixed, both Cantodunon ships and overseas traders come and go more or less as they please and the assessment of taxes is inefficient and variable. She suggests that the mouth of the Trent

be overlooked by two fortresses equipped with ballista and catapults and Heron's new fire cannisters. That the control area be set upstream from the chaotic currents of the estuary and that all vessels be required to anchor there until given permission to travel upstream. She also points out that her fellow tribesmen of the Parisi would probably be willing to cooperate in an extension of the scheme to control entry to the whole waterway system from the mouth of the Abos to the Trent, the Ouse and all the northern tributaries that reach inland from there.

"Trade is growing rapidly Lord. Despite this problem with the Brigante Federation of the west we have an increasing amount of trade with them to the north and northwest. Some of it is the established importation of wines and bronze from Gaul, but the real growth has been in our own products. Much of that has been by barter, but traders are spreading an increasing amount of coin and that has allowed the small farmers and craftsmen to join the commerce."

Gregory interrupted, puzzlement quite evident in the tone of his voice, "It seems to me Brioc, that there has been a more sophisticated review of our economy than I expected. I respect Kierha's wide experience in trading her small fleet between here and Gaul ..."

"And Germania, Lord." Kierha could not restrain herself from interjecting, "I trade along the Rhine as well - along the civilized length anyway - about a hundred miles from the sea."

"I know that Kierha, Myrcal keeps me well informed on the growth of the Parisi trading, but I am surprised that you've concerned yourself with the mechanisms of commercial expansion."

"Ah. Well I have had advice from the Lord Drusus."

"Drusus! I haven't seen him for months, surely he's not here in the town without calling?"

"Oh no Lord. He was in Beturos completing negotiations for hiring a fleet of river barges..."

Gregory nodded and grinned, "For this growing commerce along the Ouse, Trent and so on, I suppose?"

"Yes lord."

It was Drusus who had 'borrowed' a small grain ship from his father's fleet and with the help of a large gift of gold and jewels from his mother, had funded the voyage of the three

friends to Britain in the first place. That had been at the time of Tiberius's attempt to exterminate the Caecilian family. The emperor had taken all their lands and wealth, but the family was still represented in the person of Gregory. While he and Lucius had built and developed this virtual kingdom, Drusus had returned to his own trade, making peace with his father on the basis of the expanded trade resulting from Windubro and Gaul. His rare visits to Britain were looked forward to by Gregory and Lucius.

Kierha clearly saw what was going through Gregory's mind, "Lord Drusus is expecting to dock here this afternoon, when his business in Beturos is complete."

"Ah." He cocked an eyebrow at Lucius, "I think our trip to Windubro must start tomorrow, Lucius - it will be a hasty ride, but I have no intention of missing Drusus. For one thing, no-one transports wine with greater care and I'd guess that he has an amphora or two of first class wine for us."

Lucius agreed very readily and Gregory turned back to Kierha.

"Please continue, Kierha."

"I've almost finished Lord. I am suggesting that in addition to a proper Coastguard and Customs we have a Trade Council to govern the way in which merchants import, export and use our waterways - and we should use the legion to pacify the banks of the Ouse as soon as we have sufficient strength."

"Well it is certain that we need a larger army very soon, if we are to keep up with your ambitions, Kierha." The last of the Councillors, Daffyd had not spoke as yet and it was to this man that Gregory turned now. "What have you to suggest Daffyd?"

"Well Lord, Kierha was looking into aspects of trading and commerce; I took it upon myself (and a few of my Gallic friends), to consider how I believe we should govern ourselves here in this new State of Windubro and Cantodunon. My people came from the rocky west coast of Gaul. To say simply that we came is misleading. They were Venuti - sea faring folk who Julius Caesar found very troublesome, their ships were taller and stouter than Roman naval vessels and proved very difficult for him to deal with - until he rebuilt his own ships with higher bulwarks and with towers so that he conquered us. Such a simple expedient to eliminate a whole tribe, but we were relatively small and whereas Caesar could absorb naval losses, we could not and my people fled to Britain. Not all fled to Britain of course, I have cousins in Gaul and we have the usual close relationships that exiled peoples develop."

Gregory found himself comparing the history of the Venuti and the destroyed family from which this man had sprung, with his own more recent history. Tribes, families are rarely totally destroyed, would the remnants of his own make themselves known in future years? Rome was further from Britain than the land of the erstwhile Venuti; his own family, if they existed, were more widely scattered. Still ... He started as he realised that Daffyd had noticed his obvious distraction and paused.

"I'm sorry, please go on."

"I have studied the political history of that part of Gaul, Lord. What it was before Julius Caesar conquered it, what it was during the time of the conquest and what it is now when most of its citizens are either citizens of Rome or sufficiently romanised to be thought of as such. Despite what Caesar wrote of us, we Gauls were a sophisticated people long before the conquest, we governed ourselves in a very effective manner. Villages, settlements and towns were governed and regulated in a manner that kept the peace most of the time, brought us trade and commerce and the respect of other nations, but we were not a cooperative nation. In fact we were not really a nation at all. We had a common religion, languages that were similar enough for a stranger from another part of Gaul to make himself understood, laws that were very similar, but we remained a land of self-governing towns, settlements and villages. Only when Gaul was invaded by Caesar and his threat to our liberty so clear, was there any coming together of the tribes in resistance, and even then there were plenty who sided with Rome for their own purposes - because we were not a nation!

"During the time of the conquest we simply did as we were told, but Rome swiftly introduced government by our own people - under the rule of the legion and the Governor of the province. Now we have good government, but it suffers from the same basic problems that Rome has herself. In our case those problems are of no real importance because the legion can always correct them by force. The major problems as I and my debating friends see it are that the populace, whilst voting and apparently having a say in government, see their tribunes ignored by the Roman Senate. Only the nobility have any representation in the Senate and only a patrician or knight can become a senator - and then only if he qualifies in terms of wealth of land. So the government, except in times of civil disturbance, rests in the hands of the Senate and the emperor. The Senate contains more than six hundred senators, representing themselves and their families alone. Their discussion on many occasions, particularly when the state is threatened from the outside or inside, becomes merely the squabbling of relatives seeking advantage over other relatives, or one family seeking ascendancy over another. Civil disturbance is seen more

as an opportunity to advance their own or their families' fortune than an ill that must be cured for the benefit of the nation.

"My own suggestion is that we extend the system of voting that Lord Gregory instituted in Windubro and create a three tier institution. Firstly all citizens will vote for their own town or district councillor, and a district should have a population of five thousand men (I chose this figure because then a legion will count as a district), secondly all these councillors will have a vote to elect a 'Senate'; thirdly, the senators (I can think of no better name for them), will vote for twelve high Councillors. Each level of representation has its' responsibilities clearly defined and the laws and measures that it may introduce strictly defined also. Those responsibilities would need to be written down where all can see them and would require a great deal of work to set out, but if their main outlines can be defined early on then the rest will be a continuing development. Lord Gregory, I suggest that we need to appoint a series of committees to arrive at this and that these committees are also arranged in tiers so that there is not a continuous round of argument."

His speech had been received in almost total silence, whereas the other three had discussed their own thoughts with one another, Daffyd had kept his thoughts to himself and they were now trying to absorb and evaluate his suggestions.

For his part Gregory was astonished - Lucius was glowering under the distinct impression that what was being proposed was a republic. For his part Gregory had never expected that any of his citizens would arrive at a fairly detailed view of government. There were parts of it that he thoroughly approved, but he too wondered whether Daffyd was intending to erect a republic with no ultimate ruler.

"And above the twelve members of the High Council, Daffyd?"

"A king, Lord. Yourself of course, otherwise we have ultimate government by committee and indecisiveness in the face of decisions that must be made quickly and with authority."

The ruler of Windubro stared at him whilst he thought over what had been said - and what was implied. Gregory had to admit that he had not really looked at the matter of government beyond establishing the basic intention that there would be representation of the citizens - men and women - for he had easily come to the Celtic view that a woman was as effective in leadership and as responsible as a man and therefore had the same rights. Daffyd's scheme of things had much to commend itself to him. He had a picture in his mind of a form of government where the more important a decision was, the fewer

people were concerned with it - whilst still remaining answerable to the people who had elected them; even if it was at second or third hand.

He had been well pleased by the responses of the first three council members, but Daffyd's had startled him - he had not expected so knowledgeable an approach to the matter of government. His long silence at the end of Daffyd's speech worried his councillors, they exchanged glances that quite clearly questioned whether they had been wise to take their ruler's original instruction to heart. Had he really intended that they should concern themselves so deeply with his plans for the land of the two towns? They had grown accustomed to his almost casual approach to ruling the people, but now they wondered whether he was all that different at heart to the kings of the other tribes in this country. A king had a right to order his people as he would, to decide matters by simple decree and indeed, if they looked back on the brief history of both Windubro and Cantodunon he had done just that -, but often with consultation and most of the time, in a manner that was not obviously a decree.

After an uncomfortable few seconds Gregory recognised the situation, the bleak abstraction of his cold gaze softened and he hastened to reassure them. "You've very clearly thought deeply on the problems that will face us in the near future - in fact you have progressed further than I had expected.. much further." He smiled to remove any idea from their minds that he was displeased with the result, "One thing that is clear at this point, is that we need more information and advice. What we have in our Two Towns." A flash of annoyance creased his face, "Brioc, when will Medoc suggest a favoured name for our land?"

"In but a few days, Lord, he thought it would be auspicious at the time that you entertain the chief men of the Cornivii."

"How..? Oh never mind Brioc, we should all be used to his abilities to read our minds - or the future - or whatever it is that he does. His occasional pronouncements are surprising, but usually uncommonly favourable." He looked across at Lucius, "What was I going to say?" All he got in reply was a shrug of the shoulders and slight smile, Lucius had not made his mind up yet whether Gregory's rapid plunge into what appeared to be a government by the market place - by the general populace - was a good thing.

"Yes! What we have at the moment is a small population that grew from a few hundred settlers. Every one of them has housing, rations and a small plot of land. The State owns most of the livestock, the crops and the manufacturing of iron, boards etc. Our legion provides protection, enables us to dominate our immediate neighbours and, as we have

just seen, reach deeply into the lands beyond. I intend that we should preserve that and expand it. In other words I want to rule a nation that has citizens whose shelter and food is guaranteed, I want them to do as they are doing now, trading, cultivating, manufacturing on their own behalf and expanding their own wealth and the nation's, I want tax revenues, pensions for widows, orphans and, eventually the elderly and crippled, I want a system of law enforcement and I want a population that will multiply rapidly so that our legionary and commercial strength will continue to grow. Let me define what I would like each of you to deal with.

"There is something that I want you all to recognise; a century ago all Roman citizens had responsibility for the defence and, to the limit of their abilities and wealth, the wellbeing of the State. That is what we have here in the Two Towns at the moment. However, with the change to imperial rule, much of that is disappearing, power is concentrated in the hands of the nobility as Daffyd has pointed out, there are hundreds of thousands of men and women who whilst nominally classed as citizens, have little or no power except through mob action. These are people who contribute little or nothing to Rome's welfare and wealth. Many are without any worthwhile occupation, many more work at trades that do not reward them sufficiently to give them what we would consider decent living conditions. These hundreds of thousands are placated by the provision of games and a large proportion of them fed by the distribution of free grain. All of this is a considerable drain on the State's finances and it does nothing to pacify the underlying discontent. There is always the possibility of civic disturbance, of riots and occasionally what can only be described as limited civil war. Rome grew, as we are doing, from a small, well organised, tough state to its present condition, over the course of a thousand years. It is hardly surprising that things have changed, but I would like you to study the Rome of a century ago and take that into consideration when studying our own system of law and governance."

Gregory turned to his right to address the druid, "Brioc, I want you to review the laws we have, add to them or modify them and consult with my General on how we might best enforce them on our own people and any who work or trade within the kingdom." This was the first time that he had ever publicly acknowledged that he was ruling a kingdom - virtually assuming the role of king, and it slipped out without him noticing. His councillors noted it though and there was a surreptitious exchange of approving smiles as he continued, "The druidic college has a system of law already, which is what the two towns have worked within for five years, but it does not cope with the sort of problems that arise in growing towns and cities. I suggest that you look at the idea of using small groups of neighbours, with the advice of a druid to judge matters of local theft, violence and murder. If we think that the present Celtic laws serve us well in compensation and punishment then

we will use them -, but I know from my education in Alexandria that as a society grows it invents new crimes - we must be flexible enough to make law that will cope with it."

He turned to Kierha next, "You will have to look at the matter of the towns' trading, the growing merchant population and fleet, imports, exports and customs duties in much the same way. We need to encourage the growth of wealth and we must make sure that the nation gains from it, that the benefits of a foreign merchant becoming a citizen reward the responsibilities that he or she accepts with citizenship.

"Huw, by now you must see what I need you to do. Our manufacturing and agriculture are simple now, but they are getting more complex. Some manufacture is carried out in legionary workshops, some in private ones, all citizens owe the State labour time at harvest, ploughing, sowing etc. The few looms that we have, need to be fed with spun yarn. How do we control the labour that our own people, civil and. military, provide and the labour that we employ outsiders for? How do we arrange the ranking of our labour? How do we adjust the rewards? That is your task - it is a matter of building a guild system, just as you suggested, but not one that is rigid or limits the ambition of our people. And bear in mind Rome's present situation.

"Daffyd, yours is the largest task of all. I want you to formulate a framework of government that can rule a nation of more than three towns and a population of tens of thousands. Base it on the outline you just presented, but take into account the work of Brioc, Huw and Kierha. It has all got to work as a piece. Then you, Lord Lucius and I must confer to produce a system that can be described accurately and without misunderstanding - I was going to suggest that it be carved in stone and exhibited in the forum of our new town, but it is more than likely that we will need to modify it in the light of experience.

"Now! Each of you has tasks that are beyond the scope and experience of any one of you. You need to consult with others and you will need to employ others. We can afford to pay for men and women whose skills and experience will enable us to complete our unique enterprise, (I cannot recall any account of a nation attempting to regulate itself from the beginning in this way.) What is more, you can offer citizenship and ranking to men and women that I approve - examine the background of any that you recruit, our aim in all this is to encourage a populous, productive and loyal citizenry - we must not import people who could be a danger to our nation when we compete directly with Rome and Gaul. We don't want them selling military and commercial information to other enemies that we acquire. Be careful in your choices - and make no promises, or give any detailed information until you have approval from Lord Lucius or myself - incidentally that is

something else to be organised, neither of us can continue to be the sole source of approvals - a committee is needed."

There was a general series of nods, "One last thing. Your own ranking is important. Each of you will have the title of Secretary of your own department. We will have to argue out the titles of those departments, and Lord Lucius and I will come to a decision on what your salaries .." There was a stir of pleasurable surprise, salary was not a word that had been used in the two towns before, experts from Gaul had been hired, but that had been a matter of simple commercial deal, clerks had been imported and paid in exactly the same manner as the legion, being given legionary rank according to quality and responsibility.

".. will be. Let me deal with any questions that you have on our procedure over the next months and then we'll end this meeting and set a time for the next."

There was not a great amount of discussion, the work they each had to do was still only outlined, discussion would increase as complexities revealed themselves. Gregory had no doubt that there would be considerable discussion to come and, now that he had acknowledged the ranking of his Secretaries and their responsibilities, he had shared a significant part of his own authority - there would be more than simple discussion in the future. He must try to ensure that the inevitable arguments were controlled and did not take away more authority than he intended. It was something he was confident he could control.

The forest had been left behind, and the rounded hills of this southern end of the Pennines had been well cleared of trees in the last hundred years and now were dotted with small settlements, woods coppiced for building materials and firewood and a rich population of cattle and sheep. Venutius was home. Accompanied by his few remaining henchmen, the prince sat his horse in deep despondency, the hood of his cloak pulled well over his head despite the warmth and brightness of the day. It felt like one further affront. Why? He wondered, why had the Gods deserted him so? He sacrificed regularly - more in fact than his consort Cartimandua. A woman! With a womanish dislike of getting her arms bloody to the elbows in the service of the Brigantean Gods.

Twelve days ago he had left these smiling hills with a host of ten thousand, bound for the lands of the soft valley people along the Trent. Report had it that their settlements were rich, livestock, grain, iron goods and, a thing rarely seen here in the north, sawn timber boards being made in profusion by machines which any man could run profitably - given enough slaves.

The prince shuddered at the remembrance of the first shocking volley of bolts and stones that assaulted his finest warriors so that their cheerful, leaping and whooping ranks seemed to melt abruptly. He remembered charging across the field in company with warriors he had known and shared plunder with for years. His hair was flying beneath the skirt of his gilded helmet, the tussocks springing beneath his feet and he was filled with a wonderful feeling of almost flying towards the weaklings he could see hiding behind their timber walls. He was a god; invulnerable, the four foot long sword whirling over his head was light as a straw, he could wield it as long as there were necks to fall to its ravening bite. His blood seemed to boil, there was a reddish hue to his sight - and then there was a terrible whistling and thumming sound, he could not have described it - which slowed his charge to a trot for the split second he had to analyse it. Two warriors on his left were picked off the ground and whirled into the ranks behind. He had turned to gape at the great spear which after piercing their bodies had carried on to skewer two more. The deadly missiles pelted their ranks at almost every breath, reducing the army to a huge mob of screaming and panicking men with no idea in their heads, but to flee the dreadful storm, clambering over the bodies of old comrades, slashing wildly at any obstacle until they were out of range and into the safety of the woods. There Venutius counted six hundred dead.

The following day was cruel, after the Windubrons had seemed to be in his grasp and the chariots he had laboured so hard to bring through the forest had proved their worth, the impossible happened. An all, but defeated enemy had turned and with frightful precision the barrage had begun again. Cavalry on horses taller than their own mountain ponies had charged into the outskirts of his reeling army cutting out and slaughtering small groups of men, machines were drawn at breakneck speed around the field throwing smaller darts than those of the town walls, but in greater profusion. He had done well to recover three thousand, from that dreadful field. Venutius would never forget it, he was accustomed to battle and the sights of slashed bodies, blood and the stinking results of involuntary defecation and severed bowels, but he had never seen, nor expected to see, thousands of dead and mutilated men in one place. One huge charnel house - the sheer extravagance of its horror overwhelming, even to an experienced and hardened warrior. He felt no shame in having literally fled the scene, it was not cowardice, but a vast feeling of disgust - and he recognised it in those men who fled with him.

Venutius groaned, he would have done better to have left it at that and taken his depleted, but still formidable army home directly instead of attempting that raid on the Cornovi. It promised well at first, four hundred captives, cattle and sheep uncounted, but enough to impress the Federation when they returned. With fifty warriors left to herd along the bound

captives and cattle, he had hurried on towards the next settlements hoping to catch them before any warning of the raid. It was a terrible shock when mobile ballista appeared on their flanks as they passed along a shallow valley with no cover except broom and spindly birch trees. Four hundred and fifty Brigante warriors had filled the bottom of the valley in a jostling, cheerful throng, bustling along in eager anticipation of increasing the booty garnered so far. The ballista, firing at long range to avoid damaging the machines on the opposite side of the valley, tore them to shreds. Warriors stumbling through the carnage to front and rear were met by cavalry who picked them off with lazy precision on the points of lances or slashed down with sabres. Venutius made his escape with a group of a dozen or so by galloping up the sides of the valley, through the barrage and with surprisingly few losses, beyond the mobiles. Was it the same God who betrayed them to the Windubrons that sheltered them in escape?

In the dark depression of Venutius's brain a convoluted theology began to unwind. He had been preserved - for what? Was the calamitous escapade a test of some kind? A hardening of his resolve so that he would wreak revenge on the Windubrons? That could be it. It had been noticable that the town had a reduced garrison, fielding a meagre three or four hundred against his ten thousand. Without the machines he would have swept them away -, but only a small part of the population. He had been taught a lesson, two lessons. Firstly he must avoid the ballista at all costs - his warriors could handle cavalry if they were prepared for them; secondly he must gather a larger force next time so that he could divide it and simultaneously attack the town and ambush any army sent to relieve it. His fist pummelled the dusty neck of his pony as he planned his next campaign. He had to do something first to re-establish his standing again ... and he could not do that if he appeared amongst the chietains in his present sorry state. Abruptly he pulled back on the reins and halted the pony brutally.

"Hold!" His voice was suddenly vibrant with anger and the lust for revenge that had simmered in his stomach throughout the last day's march. The bedraggled warriors eyed him wonderingly, he had their loyalty - he always would have until death -, but there was little enthusiasm.

"What are we doing, eh? Are we to return to our families like beaten dogs eager for comfort after being savaged by a pack of mongrels? There are other Cornovi to the south and west. We won't be so ambitious this time, but it still will not take long to restore our fortune. And the Scanti to the west have gold. Let us find a camp, rest for a few days and then begin our new campaign - then, when we have strength enough, we will return and sack Windubro. There are ways to avoid their machines - and I have a taste for revenge."

Throwing back his hood, he janked the pony's head to face south west and trotted off. Somewhat hesitantly his band of ten warriors followed.

"Espionage?" Drusus's voice was incredulous.

"You could call it that, old friend," Smiling quietly at the shorter man, "In fact I suppose that I really want to expand the process into exactly that, but for the moment, all we need is to have accurate information on the background on any from Gaul that we wish to employ or take as citizens."

Drusus was a short man, dark curly hair clad his round head in carefully arranged rolls and there was a definite hint of frequent seagoing in the movements of his thickset body. He had been one of the three who had fled to Britain when Tiberius proscribed Gregory's whole family. The eldest son of a man who was much more than a shipowner and merchant (he controlled most of the shipping that transported grain from Egypt to Ostia), it was he who had 'borrowed' cash from his father, accepted a chest full of jewellery from his doting mother and provided the ship that brought them all to this island. Since then he had developed trade along the western coast of Gaul, made his piece with his father - after returning the cash with a suitable addition by way of interest - and now had a sizable interest in all the trade that flowed down the Rhine and the Seine - and from Britain.

"Who better to discover what a man has done, or not done in the Roman Provinces? I know that you already have a network of informers to sustain and protect your traders against the vicissitudes of the market. Would it be hard to employ some of them to investigate the few people who are interested in us and whom we are interested in?"

"I can assure you Gregory that your fame here in Windubro and Cantodunon has evoked a very great interest on the other side of the channel."

Gregory shared a glance with Lucius and Myrcal, the four of them were gathered in his office for this conference with Drusus, "In that case it is even more imperative that we have accurate intelligence of what is happening over there -, but for the moment, let us stick with this question of the reliability of men and women that will shortly be offered a place here."

The shorter man inclined his head in agreement, "I can do that for you very easily, Gregory and be pleased to do so And yes, I can set up an espionage network for you

too, but I won't be your spymaster, that's a fulltime job and my own interests - and Windubro's - require my attention."

"That's all that we need Drusus. I'm sure that we all agree that our burgeoning trade would suffer if your attention was diverted from our mutual business. It's thanks to your devotion that we have done so well here. You know that we'll not forget."

With a little embarrassed quirk of his mouth Drusus shrugged off the comment, "I have done very well out of it too you know. However," He pointed a finger accusatively at Lucius, "what have you done to protect your interests here in Britain? Do you have an intelligence corp?"

"I have scouts and surveying teams, Drusus - and a signal system that brings information from areas almost a hundred miles away." There was a clear sense of affront in Lucius's words.

"Doubtless, but all you get is what is open to view. Scouts you said, a scout does not know what is in the heart of the men he observes - he simply tells you what they are doing now in the daylight, not who they were conspiring with last night!"

The two rulers of the towns looked at each other, it was a point that both had missed. To the best of their knowledge all actions against them in the past had been 'open to view'. Windubro was not seen to be a great threat to the kingdoms around them, those that had eyed them aquisitively, or simply as a useful exercise for under employed warriors had no reason to conceal their actions. This crushing defeat of the Brigante - a warlike nation that all other nations feared - would change that somewhat. Those that bore them ill will would take more care to avoid being detected by ordinary reconnaissance in the future. Venutius could have taken the precaution of searching out any scouting parties ahead of his army and then eliminating them so that Windubro would have had no warning until they broke from the forest. The battle would have had a very different ending then. Had there been spies in Brigante country, the gathering of Venutius's force must have been obvious well before they began their march. There would have been a chance to set ambushes in the same manner as they had when Medoc's druids had brought them warning of the Ordovicii's invasion or much earlier, when the Cornovi made the last foray into brigandage and their advance scouting of the forest around Ratas had been discovered. Both had been discovered fortuitously.

"Drusus is perfectly right you know Gregory," Myrcal's soft voice carried no hint of criticism, "none of us gave any thought to seeking intelligence in an organised fashion. It surely is right that we do so now. As Drusus says, we have been a prize for some time, but

now we must be seen as a dangerous one to attack without proper preparation. There are several British princes who are sophisticated enough to adopt more civilised, circumspect routes to their ambition - Caradoc for one, his loutish brother for another. When the old king dies - and they have settled who inherits the south eastern kingdoms - the winner will make plans to take the Two Towns.

"Yes. Lucius must create a web of intelligence gatherers - spies, if you will - as he goes about on his normal surveying trips., but I think that he should consult Brioc first."

This did not seem a good idea to Gregory, "If we were able to persuade Brioc to employ his bardoi and druids for espionage - and I cannot see him agreeing - it would damage the brotherhood of druids irreparably. Remember that it is our hope to identify the Two Towns with druidism, to adopt the worship of the major Celtic Gods and use religion to cement loyalty. That is part of the solution that I saw for maintaining the loyalty of all the new citizens we intend to recruit, and much to my pleasure, it was essentially Brioc's suggestion at the meeting of the Great Council. If bardoi were discovered spying for Windubro, it would destroy their standing within the tribes."

"Ah no! I was not suggesting that Brioc form a spy web, but that he could point Lucius toward men who would be useful." And then she grinned at Lucius, "You ought to decide who is to teach our General, exactly how to construct and maintain a network of spies. I'm sure that the army manuals don't go much further than dealing with the need for reconnaissance."

Lucius's expression left no doubt about this view of his expertise - and Gregory wondered where Myrcal's insight was born. The question showed in his eyes; at least it did to his wife, "It only needs a little thought Gregory. Where would a young Roman officer make contact with the sort of men that could could spy for him? If he found them how would he learn to control them, evaluate the information, discover and punish treachery? Legionary officers lead a rather circumscribed existence, don't they, Lucius?" His nod confirmed it.

"Well then!, but I'll bet Drusus knows some nefarious characters who (with due precaution), will make useful candidates for the job?"

Drusus acknowledged that this was true, but... "It will take a very long time to find someone and then to check their background to make sure that they would not betray your 'web' of spies."

"But how could they betray it," There was just a touch of impatience in Myrcal's voice, "They'll know nothing about it, apart from the fact that there is one. All we will employ them for is to advise Lucius on how to construct the web. What harm can they do us? And why should we keep them here once the job is done and Lucius feels confident that he can manage very nicely on his own?"

The look of astonishment on Drusus's face brought a gust of laughter from Gregory, "You're not used to British women, my friend. You must forget your Roman ideas of stately, retiring matrons - don't you remember how the women of Windubro manned the walls when the small legion we had then went off into the forest byways just over three years ago to ambush the Cornovii? And she runs her own and Cantodunon's trading vessels."

Getting to his feet, Drusus spread his arms wide and made a shallow bow, "Forgive me Lady. You must have found my incredulity insulting?"

"Dear Drusus, I felt no such thing. You are Gregory's oldest friend apart from Lucius here, and I know quite well how much you have helped us in the past. So dear a friend could not insult with a mere look of astonishment - I found it rather flattering. My husband has ceased to be astonished by anything I say or do."

"Oh no, my dear. You can't accuse me of that." Gregory's tone was positive, but nevertheless he was intent on bring the conversation back to the former business, "Drusus, please recruit someone to advise us on espionage and the sooner you can form a network in Gaul the better we will be pleased."

"It will be expensive Gregory."

"That is the least of our concerns. Have you any idea what the value of our exchequer is at the moment?" It was a rhetorical question, only he and Myrcal knew the full state of the accounts, Lucius took no interest in anything except the Legion's pension fund and the distribution of booty. "Our state exchequer holds a surplus of over two million sesterces - after distributing two million in civilian and legionary shares last year, Lucius and I have seven million between us. At the end of this year the surplus of trade will be at least doubled. I don't want to throw money away, but we can afford good men."

Drusus's eyebrows rose, "I see a large part of your trade of course, but I hadn't realised it had expanded quite so much."

"Oh yes, sawn timber, iron weapons and tools, wool, a little cloth -, but that's likely to stop when the Legion expands until we can increase the supply of spun yarn - and, do you see that bronze plate over there?" Gregory pointed at a table to the side of his friend, it was two hand spans in diameter and covered in an intricate Celtic animal and foliage designs.

"Very nice."

"Thank you. We've just started making those and similar pieces of table ware. How much do you think you could sell a batch of one hundred for?"

"A hundred -, but they're a luxury item, you don't make them by the hundred!"

"We will, Drusus. How much?"

"Well firstly I would sell them in batches of ten to keep the price right, - they're not castings are they?"

"No, each one is beaten out, they are nice and light."

"Well then, I could easily sell for thirty sesterces each and leave plenty of profit for the retailer. How many can you make in a year?"

Gregory burst out laughing, while the others looked at him in wonder, "This is a new project and Myrcal and Lucius have not seen the tool I've built at Windubro to make them yet." He paused for a short while to get his breath back. "We won't supply a year's production Drusus - it would collapse the market - I have a team of men and women making three hundred a week!"

It took a few seconds for the figures to register and Gregory savoured each one of them, "You remember the monstrous machine that Heron made the sword blades on at Alexandria." It had been a primitive, but huge drop forge operated by steam and it had horrified both his friends when they saw it, shrouded in escaping steam, reflecting the flare of the hearths that supplied the heat and making a thunderous noise every time it fell and struck the dies beneath it.

The two men nodded, "Heron has not succeeded in reproducing it yet, so I made a smaller one that is run by the water wheels - my team of six men and women produce ten finished plates an hour."

"Ten!"

"Ten, and Windubro will ship them to your ships here at Cantodunon, for twelve sesterces each in batches of one hundred, packed in straw and crated.... There are other products too, of course, all at similar prices - and we can supply gilded ware in a few months."

"Good God Gregory, you'll swamp the market. This sort of stuff needs skilled slaves - and I doubt if one slave could make five in a week."

"Well we'll be guided by you, but the secret isn't in the machine in total, one of our citizens had a family recipe for a bronze that can be beaten when nearly white hot - that makes it possible to hammer a thin disk with one stroke, and then a single stroke on a second machine equipped with a die and a bed of sand, forms the design - all the rest is the simple hard work of polishing the metal."

Getting up from his chair, Gregory stepped away from the table, "We will keep the machines at Windubro and one or two of the settlements in the midlands along the Trent - that will be close to supplies of copper and tin - and iron. It is convenient and fewer foreigners will see the workshops.

"Those drop forges will make iron sheet as well, helmets, ribbed strips for our design of segmenta lorica, shin and arm guards, blades, plough coulter blades, shovel tips and all much faster and cheaper than slave labour in Gaul. It is unlikely that our machines would be copied over there or in other parts of the Roman empire, they're too committed to the use of slaves, but siting them in the midlands makes it even less likely. All this expansion and the increasing number of our citizens who are working independantly, is the reason why we called the council meeting that you must have heard of in the town - it means that we can no longer treat them as a sort of large family, making distributions of coin when we feel like it, controlling everything directly on orders from Lucius, Myrcal or me. The four council members will be contacting you with a view to obtaining advisors on a range of economic and political matters - and employees from the Roman and Gaulish civil servants - and again, that is why we need you to vet the most important of those officers."

Looking up at his restlessly pacing friend, Drusus pursed his lips and declared, "I would like to obtain an exclusive trading arrangement with you for the bronze goods Gregory and the gilded bronze too."

"Well you can certainly have our first exports my friend, we owe you that much at the least, but Kierha - you remember Kierha?"

"Large lady with an iron bust and muscles?"

"And a very shrewd trader on her own account. She is our Secretary of Trade now, and when the department is properly organised, that sort of deal will be handled there."

"How soon do you think that will be d'you think?"

"There'll be time for you to make a million or two, Drusus, but after that you'll have to share the trade with our own ship owners and traders I am afraid - I calculate that there is at least ten million a year in bronze goods alone."

"And the sheet iron?"

"If all goes as we plan at our meeting with the Cornovii the day after tomorrow, we will have enough iron and charcoal to keep five or six of the large drop forges working - that will be a great deal of trade Drusus." He paused for a moment and the look of triumph at the prospects opened up by his new machines gave way to a more serious one, "It means that most of our citizens will have more coin than they know what to do with - even the incorrigibly lazy and incompetent - receive one town share every year - if they don't refuse to labour in the fields when required. One ordinary citizen's share earned one hundred sesterces last year, it could be two hundred this year and a centurion or a foreman craftsman gets at least ten times that! These are people who never even seen silver coins until Windubro was founded. Can you imagine what will happen to all that coin if there is no mechanism to control and employ it? If we were lucky, it would all be buried under the hearthstones for Gods' sakes!

"We need those experts and clerks Drusus. Do your best for us, eh!"

"That I will old friend - and get even richer in the process."

"There is that, of course., but you realize that our commerce and industry will make us even more attractive in the eyes of the magnates that wish the emperor to invade Britain?" Drusus's nod was sufficient, "Well, we must be organised and ready with a strong legion when it comes."

"Agreed."

PROPERTY OF MERTHYR TYDFIL
PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Myrcal, Lucius and I are riding to Windubro tomorrow, ready for the meeting with the Cornovii."

Drusus, quirked his mouth, "One hundred miles in the day? I don't need to ask really I suppose, but you have stables and spare mounts arranged every twenty miles in the Roman fashion?"

Lucius grinned and confirmed his surmise, "But we don't need to travel the distance in one day - and we have a hostelry at the halfway point of Windubro and Cantodunon. We can travel fast and in comfort too, Gregory's had a four seat chariot built with padded seats - a five hour journey to the hostelry at the most. Our couriers do the full trip in twelve, eating and drinking in the saddle!"

"Impressive."

"Why thank you Drusus, when I get back I'll show you the legion's communications office and maproom." Lucius's pride in his legion and growing network of roads and semaphores showed in his voice and his face fell when Drusus said that he had to decline.

"My ship will be loaded and ready to cross the channel again by the time you set off tomorrow, but I'll be back as soon as Gregory tells me he has a shipment of bronze goods."

Gregory answered the question in his eyes, "Probably about six weeks -, but I doubt that we can have any gilding done by then."

"Never mind, six weeks will do very well and thank you."

Their business concluded, Gregory and Myrcal spent the afternoon with the merchant, showing him the workshops and warehouses and finally seeing him installed in a room at the State House.

"Do you still break your fast early Drusus?"

"As early as you Friend."

"Then we'll make our farewells before we set off in the morning. Sleep well."

Chapter Six.

Three days later Gregory and Myrcal received a group of Cornovii chieftains in the Windubron State House. The room was an extension to the old house, newly built in stone and decorated within in Roman style with plastered walls, a dado in blue and gold of dolphins dancing across a sea of stylized waves separated lower walls of earth red from the upper plasterwork of pale yellow. Scenes of Celtic figures in woods and meadows occupied frames distributed evenly around the walls. The floor was still unfinished - a polished surface of fine concrete, awaiting the attention of the mosaicists -, but clad with woven mats of coloured rushes to leave a central corridor leading to a raised platform with carved seats and a background simulation of Sucellos. Gregory and Myrcal rose from their seats as the chieftains entered the hall.

Gregory waited until the little group of fourteen had gathered before the platform, and then stepped down to greet them.

"Chief men and women of the Cornovii, I greet you in friendship. You already have some idea of why we asked you to come here, but shortly you will be take about our town, to see the way our citizens live and work. We are a rich town and, as you have seen, well able to protect ourselves and our friends. Friendship is what we offer your people. We would like to build small towns in your country, and take some of your people as citizens and recruits for the legion. You will see that our citizens are growing rich by any standard that you will be familiar with," He held up his right hand in slight apology, "I am not intending to insult you, believe me, but our towns are quite different from anything else in Britain - and so are our people." He indicated his officers standing to one side, "My centurions will guide you about the town, go where you will, speak to whoever you like and then join me for our evening meal - we're making it a celebration of our victory over the Brigante - don't make the mistake of thinking we eat as extravagantly every day."

There was a murmur of thanks and approval and the hall emptied except for Gregory and Myrcal.

"Aren't you going with them Gregory? You're usually very keen to show off your achievements."

He didn't attempt to deprecate his part in the growth of the towns, but, "I don't want them to feel that anybody they meet and question is inhibited by my presence - or yours. Let them roam free, we'll talk to them tonight."

The chieftains and their escorts scattered throughout Windubro, inspecting the ordinary wooden houses, the stone built merchants houses, the busy offices of the State House which incorporated the Praesideum, the legionary offices and shrines in the Principia, granaries, ox driven corn mills, warehouses of imported goods, warehouses of exports, workshops, bath houses, ironworks, huge blowers for them and the forges - all driven by watermill, trip-hammers in the forge - also driven by water power, docks, barges. Then along the river, three more watermills, docks, the concrete leat and water wheel lift that fed across the town for the bath houses, latrines and drinking water, the bridge and bridge house, dam and fish traps. It was an extensive tour - or series of tours, and the culmination was a display of two cohorts of fully armoured heavy infantry on the parade ground. One thousand men marching, counter marching, performing battlefield manoeuvres and finally a staged battle over a temporary section of wall made of timbers and sod. Lucius watched the whole proceedings with justifiable pride and evident pleasure at the effect it had on the Cornovii. The martial display ended at the same time as the town dwellers finished their work for the day and the crowds that they passed through on their way to the State House again for the evening meal. If anything that was probably the most impressive experience of the day, for the details of the booty taken from the Brigante and the number of captives had spread amongst the Windubrons and the throngs that hastened to their homes and the bath houses were noisy and cheerful.

The banquet was laid out in the main reception hall. All the matting had been removed and tables laden with the various dishes scattered about the room. Far more chairs than guests

were distributed at random, so that they, their centurion escorts and the dozen or so of Windubro's leading citizens who had been invited, would find a seat wherever they stopped to chat. It was a very mobile meal and a noisy one as they compared their individual impressions of Windubro and its people. Pork, mutton, beef and chickens all came from Windubro's fields of course. There was no venison, very few game animals remained within ten miles of the town and it was the wrong time of year anyway, the stags were getting close to rut, hinds were busy fattening themselves for pregnancy and the winter and yearlings were taboo. Dishes of the meats prepared in both Celtic and Roman style, complete unadorned joints to cut from in the first case - dainty collops marinaded and then served in heaped plates with shaped vegetables and sauces in the second. Wheaten cakes and small loaves, pots of, butter and wild fruits cooked in wine and honey in larger pots were also Windubron produce. The only salmon in the town were smoked from last year's run and quite unsuitable for a banquet.

The wine was a respectable Gaulish red, a little rough of course, but Gregory had no intention of opening his precious stock of Tuscan for this crowd - the idea of sharing his

two remaining amphora of Falernian never even occurred to him., but other imports from Gaul and Hispania were there, morels and truffles, oranges shipped from India and originating in some land further east still - Gregory found the rind very thick and the sharp fruit within was not to his taste, but they kept well and always looked splendid amongst the other fruit. Blanched leeks, asparagus, artichokes and almonds were amongst the other unfamiliar foods and all provoked interest and comment. Gregory was becoming familiar with the names of the most important of the chieftains and could put names to some of the others with reasonable accuracy, but by the time the appetites began to flag he had given up the attempt to memorise any more, simply labelling them in his mind by the letters of the alphabet. Chief amongst them was A, an elderly man who, it turned out, had been one of the invading Cornovii who had attempted to raid Ratas in Windubro's early days. A sprightly figure with a mop of red hair and lean features, he spent most of his time discussing battle tactics with Lucius. Having been on the receiving end of a barrage and also witnessing the effects on the Brigante, he had a unique point of view. He continued the theme with Gregory who gathered that whatever resentment had lingered over the Cornovii's abject defeat had been dispersed by seeing the far more warlike Brigante fare no better against Windubro's army.

"And yet there seemed to be no warriors amongst your people now."

"Well, Lord. Your legion saw to that, four warriors and seven fighting men went to the gathering from my own village. I got back as you see, but of the others only two of the fighting men and - they threw their weapons away in their flight." It was plain that he still held to the outlook of the noble warrior caste towards the ordinary armed men that they led into war.

The old warrior had six sons and an uncounted number of grandsons and he was enthusiastic about them being taken into the legion and trained in Windubron ways. Certainly it was possible, he was assured, but he would have to realise that his sons might already be too set in their ways to take to absolute discipline. "They have no martial ways, they are herdsman, good men, hard men, but no training with weapons." He was pleased that Gregory thought that it was very possible in that case, and he called over a handful of other chiefs until Lucius and Caionac were being bombarded with questions on the legion by a circle of Celts eager for information.

There were two prominent women, B was elegant and middle aged, tall and robustly made with a cheerful round face surrounded by carefully pinned blonde curls and an upright figure that was more boyish than matronly. C was tall as well, but her features were stern and her chestnut hair was clubbed and bound with crimson cord. Both were earnestly

discussing the industry they had seen. Gregory noticed them because they had cornered Duor the master smith and were conducting a strident conversation or argument that carried clearly over the noise of the surrounding groups. When he joined them, they fell silent for a while and Duor gave Gregory an eloquent look of relief and quickly slipped away. They had been impressed with the new drop hammer. It consisted of two upright oaken posts that embraced and controlled a sliding 'hammer' of two hundred pounds. Over the machine was a wheel rotated by the waterwheel, a rope attached to the top of the hammer passed over the wheel and a simple arrangement of a roller on the end of long lever and a small counterweight to provide tension, allowed the operator to press the rope onto the periphery of the wheel so that it lifted the hammer to a number of heights marked on the uprights. When the hammer was released the rope came loose and the hammer crashed down onto the anvil beneath.

The women had been particularly impressed with the physique of the smith - he was a thin, weedy man who each considered they could handle with one hand - if they so desired - yet this weak specimen was hammering iron with greater power than any brawny smith. Surely if he could do that then so could a woman. They wanted to apprentice themselves to Duor!

"I did not know that your settlements were interested in metalwork? It was my impression that there are hardly any smiths in all the Cornovii villages."

"Oh true, Lord. True." The thinner of the two, B, leaned forward to clasp his arm familiarly, "And it is for that reason that we wished to learn the craft. The machines make it so easy that a smith no longer needs to be hugely muscular, **we** could do it without any problems at all."

But there was a problem, a considerable problem and it had nothing to do with physique. Although Gregory had known of female metalworkers in Alexandria and here in Britain, they handled gold, silver, copper and bronze, never iron. For some reason (he thought it was a magical one), iron was judged to be the province of the male alone. Iron was a strange metal compared with the others, it was difficult to melt and it changed it's state if it was burned in a binding of leather and horn - becoming steel, which could then be heat treated to be hard or soft, brittle or bendable. Or treated to produce a mixture of these qualities. The only way to harden copper or bronze was to beat it - iron responded a little that way too, but most importantly, iron or the steel that it could be converted into was stronger than any other metal. He had to admit that if you wished to apply maleness or femaleness to it, it was definitely male.

He tried to explain this to them (he could not believe that they were truly unaware of it), and to excuse Duor's horror at their request.

"It is a tradition ladies. A religious aspect of the craft. You could not expect that our master smith would relish having a radical change made."

Both women tried to interrupt him, but not stridently, he was, after all, the Lord of Windubro. "No ladies, there are many industries that our women follow, but not this one. It is a matter of religion as I said." A sudden mischievous urge made him continue, "You should speak to Brioc." He indicated the head druid standing with a couple of his bardoi and chatting happily away to a group of Cornovii. "I'm sure he'd be happy to discuss it with you." They left, looking dubious at the propriety of broaching a religious matter in the noisy environs of this celebratory gathering. Gregory breathed a sigh of relief and looked about for his wife.

Myrcal and Kierha were involved in their own group, probably discussing trade and shipping he thought and decided that he did not want to intrude. He looked about him, the room was full of small groups in animated conversation, of the forty or so men and women, the Lord of Windubro was the only one who stood alone with no present involvement in conversation or argument, feeling a little affronted Gregory filled a cup with mixed water and wine. Not many there seemed to be watering theirs, the noise was rising and the idea of breathing fresh night air was momentarily very tempting, but he squashed the thought and seated himself at an empty table to sip at his cup as he looked on and waited.

An hour later he had consumed another cup, but the noise was subsiding as conversations gradually were exhausted for the time being. It was time to close the banquet, he got to his feet, stepped up onto the raised platform, cleared his throat and spoke loudly over the receding hubbub, "Gentlemen, Ladies. If you please."

Men and women turned towards him and slowly fell silent.

"Thank you." He made a brief pause to consider again what he wanted to say - and realised that although he undoubtedly knew the substance he had not given any thought to the actual words - and words and speech patterns meant a great deal to the Celts. In fact, he admitted silently, the words that had come to his mind as he was about to open his mouth sounded very much like the opening line of an Alexandrian salesman he had once overheard loudly drawing his client's attention to "a most attractive property". The

conversations had barely trickled away and the few seconds of his realisation were not noticeable. He altered his intention on the spot.

"We have rooms made ready for you where you may rest and two bath houses here at the State House. They are yours for the next few days - or if you prefer it, the river traffic is constant and a barge will take you to Cantodunon in three days in comfort, with the convenience of seeing our small settlements along the Trent, the watermills, the workshops and barge quays. We have great pride in what we are building. The Land of the Two Towns has become rich, its' citizens all have wealth to one degree or another, not least because each one of them has the certainty of a roof, food and companionship.

"Tomorrow is mid-summer, the only work being done will be in preparing for the feast, the singing and the dancing, and Medoc the Supreme Druid has a ceremony to perform at the Nematon. We are about to be given a true name for this country of ours, a name deemed auspicious by the Druid College," Gregory had decided that there was no point in attempting to make the matter one of consultation between Medoc and himself - he had no ideas for a suitable Celtic name anyway. "We celebrate Lugh as the pre-eminent God of our land and Sucellos as the specific Guardian of Windubro and Cantodunon. Please join us for the ceremony and the feasting, Brioc has told me that Conovii Druids and bardoi have been invited to swell the numbers of the celebrants and add to the breadth of the singing and poetry. I will see you all tomorrow, but now I will leave you to do what you will. Your centurion escorts already know where your sleeping quarters have been arranged - I hope that are enjoying your visit. We shall speak again after mid-summer night ... At mid-day. Goodnight to you all."

The speech was met with mannered applause, D stepped forward and delivered an impromptu (or modified from a standard), poem of thanks and appreciation. Gregory smiled at his audience and followed by Myrcal and Lucius, left them to their own devices. He was well pleased with events so far - he must wait until tomorrow to see what Medoc and Brioc had planned and how effective it would be in easing the expansion of the Windubron settlements and signals stations into the lands around the Severn, Trent and Dove. Otherwise, he admitted, it would be a matter of conquest and incorporation in the Roman manner - and they did not have the manpower or wealth to squander on that heavy handed, but effective approach.

Chapter seven.

Brioc had borrowed carpenters from the legion to modify the simple Nematón, which had consisted of a level field enclosed by stone markers, dominated by a central pole of stripped and polished pine. Now the pole was flanked by a stout timber platform decorated with flowers and bushes set in wickerwork tubs, and four archways wreathed in flowers and foliage at the north, south, east and west of the perimeter. The boundary markers had been moved outwards to provide more space for the six thousand people, both citizens and non-citizens, who had gathered there by mid-day. It was a noisy crowd, men, women and children all in holiday mood and dressed in their best clothes, which in these relatively affluent times were a great deal more than the simple, bright plaid dresses, or breeks and short cloak fastened with a brooch. The supply of silver that most citizens had and the availability of cloth and jewellery imported from Gaul, Rome, Hispania and Egypt added a wild array of brilliant linens, peacock feathers, fine goatskin buskins, cottons and moulded leather helmets to the already brightly hued Celtic garb. Except for the half cohort of legionaries arranged as an honour guard to east and west of the platform there was a complete lack of uniformity.

A roadway had been marked with small flags on posts, from the southern gatehouse of the town to the southern archway of the Nematón and, as the shadow touched the last stone before the central one, a small procession began a solemn march along the road. It was led by Medoc, seated on a carrying chair (he was reputed to be in his ninth decade and rarely walked more than a few yards), a small group of druids and bardoi playing pipes, Gregory and Myrcal, Lucius and Catlin, one pair behind the other and then a solid group of the leading citizens and officers of both towns. The procession followed the course marked for it, finally winding around the boundary of the Nematón to enter by the southern entrance and march staidly towards the platform. As they neared their goal, the column split to east and west and climbed up onto the platform. They halted with Medoc and the rulers of the Two Towns at the centre. The chair was lowered and the old man climbed out to stand with his back to the crowd and facing the sun. The shadow tip touched the central stone behind him - it was exactly mid-day - and Medoc raised his arms, calling down a blessing on all gathered there. It was a short rhyming prayer delivered in a sing-song, with two pauses for a resonant response from the people.

Medoc lowered his arms and turned to face his rapt audience. "Sucellos the Good Striker, the Guardian of the two towns and Lugh the great God of all skills, of prophecy, art and craft, look now on this place. Here where Windubro was born and in turn gave birth to Cantodunon, a Great Kingdom comes into being - as was prophesied two hundred years

ago by the first College of the Brython Druids. It already has a name, but none have recognised it until this moment when the Gods approve its use from this day on.

"This nation which will encompass the whole of the Island, holds the name of Camelod"

There was a sudden stir amongst the crowd, the name was known from old stories. A kingdom that showed promise of uniting the land, but then crumbled with only a promise that it would rise again - under the guidance of two strangers. Gregory did not recognise the name, it had never been uttered in his presence as far as he knew, but the legend - or prophesy - was the same that Medoc had confided to him and Lucius when Cantodunon was founded three years ago.

"Camelod!" It was a name to conjure with - it was itself a conjuration - and the crowd seethed with the chatter of men and women who knew the story passing it on to any neighbour who did not.

Two of Brioc's bardoi stepped to the front of the platform, harps seated on their hips and struck chords as a third, clad in long saffron coloured robes with green twists of foliage embroidered on its face, began to sing. His voice was mature, a clear baritone that carried well across the gathering, and in an older version of the language than the common day speech, he told of the rise of that earlier Camelod, its glories, the heroes it raised, the battles against the Gordel Celts and its' triumph over them - only to fail at the last as a result of treachery and greed.

"Many centuries ago the land of Britain consisted of small tribes and kingdoms that constantly warred with on another, until the great God Lugh became impatient with them, that they wasted their manhood and wealth in constant strife.

"This land shall be one Land with one King and that King will be the anointed of Lugh. And the anointed shall rule all this Land and his descendants from his sons and daughters through all the generations. And this shall be."

Lugh overlooked the land for a man of pure, strong heart and determination until he found such a one in the very heart of the land. He was a tall man with an open face, young, but recognised by his peers as being truly honest and not serving the needs of the moment. His name was Arto.

Lugh revealed himself to Arto (as he never had to any other man before), and said to him, "If you will worship me and bring the people to worship me alone and obey my Laws, I will

Celtic Empire - Camelod

covenant with you to give you dominion over this land and this people, for all time, even down to your furthest generation. Will you so covenant?"

Arto was silent, for he was amazed, and answered not.

Lugh asked him again, "Will you covenant to worship me and acknowledge my Laws?"

But Arto was still struck dumb, for he was in great fear of the awesome being that was revealed to him.

A third time the great God Lugh demanded answer and finally Arto took hold of his courage and made a solemn pledge to worship Lugh and lead the people to him that they might worship him and keep the Law of the good God Lugh. And Lugh withdrew from his sight, but left a gleaming sword as a sign of the covenant that existed between him and Arto and Arto's people.

Arto took the sword and went forth and gathered followers and formed an army which triumphed over all who opposed them - and after one score of years the Land was whole. Arto was its' King and Lugh its' only God and the people obeyed the Law.

In the thirty fifth year of his rule Arto travelled to a distant part of his kingdom and sojourned with a baron of those parts. The baron was elderly and had recently take a young wife called Gwenifar - a woman of shining beauty. Arto was in his fifth decade and thought to be a modest man with no thought of evil. A man who obeyed the Law of Lugh rigorously and who had never sought the company of any woman than his queen Morgit.

But the sight of Gwenifar set his heart to beat the faster, the sound of her voice when she spoke and when she sang the ancient songs of the bardoi, inflamed his brain - and the touch of her hand aroused his loins in a manner unbecoming in a man of probity and honour. Arto took the wife of his baron and when the noble remonstrated with the King in the court, Arto slew him - cutting off his head with the great shining sword given him by Lugh.

As the bleeding body lay on the floor of the court a voice was heard by all present, "Thou hast broken thy covenant with me! The Law has been flouted and a great sin committed with the sword of righteousness. I withdraw my favour from the people of this Land and from its King. Behold!" And a lightening bolt struck the great doors of the court and they fell and a chill wind howled through it, filling all with fear and apprehension.

Then followed years of turmoil. Rebellion spread throughout the land and although Arto prostrated himself in the great temple of Lugh and sought forgiveness and followed the Law scrupulously from that moment on - and dismissed the woman Gwenifar to the Holy Island to live a life far from men - the great God Lugh did not turn his face toward him again and the Land sank into dissension and lawlessness. In his last battle with rebellion Arto gave all his wealth to be distributed amongst his people and on the very field of battle pleaded with the Lord Lugh to forgive his people and open his face to them again, "For the fault was mine and mine alone. Take my life and return thy presence to the people."

Arto's prayer was heard. A great light was seen in the sky and it shed a bolt which made a hole in the earth between the two armies, while a voice declaimed, "I am the Great God Lugh and these are my people, but because of the sin of Arto their King they will not be whole until I bring another King from a far land. And his soul shall be Arto's soul and he will join the Land in all its parts so that it be whole again and Camelod lives once more."

Then the battle was fought. All day the armies strove against each other until eventually that of Arto was triumphant and the rebels fled from the field in disarray. In the last moments the leader of the rebels turned and flung a spear which pierced Arto's lung. It was a fatal wound, the King sat his horse still, but was doomed. As he felt his life ebbing away, he called to the God Lugh, "Lord God, I sinned and was punished., but I have kept faith with you ever since and truly repent my error. I call upon you now to honor your covenant and restore your presence to your people in Love and Mercy."

And the hill that bore the mounted King was bathed in light and a voice was heard, "I forgive you Arto. Your people shall be reunited as I promised - when the stranger King arrives on these shores and makes himself known by his deeds. Come home Arto, who sinned, but the once and truly repented."

As the King turned his horse towards the light he spoke his last words to this world, "Fear Lugh alone and keep the law - With his Grace, I shall return." He and his fluttering banner with the device of a golden crane waited quietly on the hill - and then the light took him and faded and the horse was left standing quietly with no sign of his rider, nor any trace of armour or caparison.

After a moment it trotted down the hill and began to graze amongst the dead and wounded of that terrible field.

This is the legend of Arto and Camelod his Kingdom."

The bardoi's tale ended on a triumphant rising phrase that died away in the echoes from the woods behind the Nematón. There was an appreciative exhalation of breath from his audience and then a huge outpouring of enthusiasm. Gregory stood a little dazed, although he had had difficulty with some of the passages the old language was sufficiently close to the Celtic he had been accustomed to use for the last five years. He smiled down at Myrcal: who could doubt from the behaviour of their own people and the Cornovii Chieftains that Camelod would grow rapidly in these midlands of Britain? The Coritani, Cornovii, Scanti, Parisii and Ioeni were sufficiently related that their Druids traveled easily through their divided lands even during one of the frequent periods of raiding. This story or prophesy would legitimise his planned expansion and conversion of the people to - Camelodian - citizens. The name had a ring to it. How much of this had been Medoc's invention he wondered? That final touch of the device of a golden crane on the standard for instance. Medoc knew Gregory's nickname amongst the people of Windubro and Cantodonon - the Crane. For certain it could not be coincidence - and just as certainly he was not going to challenge it.

Medoc made a final short speech, a single sentence, "In the names of Lugh and Sucellos let the feasting begin." And he climbed onto his chair again and was taken out through the cheering crowd to the feast ground outside the Nematón, but his eye flickered as he passed Gregory - it might have been a wink - and he mouthed, "Wait" .

"For what?" Murmured Gregory, "For how long?"

It would be four years before he learnt the answers to those two questions - and when he did he would have forgotten he had ever asked them.

Ian was sprawled on the grass outside the fulling mill. Last night's feasting had extended well into the early morning and he had been unwise enough to switch from honey beer to the much more powerful honey wine - a full bodied, slightly sweet mead, two years old. It was delightful, but seemed to affect the memory - he did not remember drinking excessively and the discovery that the flagon was empty came as a surprise - and now he was paying the price. Thank Sucellos he had apparently fallen asleep in a moderately respectable fashion - he had no bruises and when the late morning sun awoke him, none of his companions eyed him with reproach. He chuckled - and winced - few of the men who lay about him when he got carefully to his feet, were any more capable of making judgements on decorous behaviour than he was. You would have thought a battle had taken place from the number of sprawled out, dew soaked bodies on the grass ... fewer than half had nodded a painful response to his morning greeting.

There would be no work today. A fulling mill was the last place that a man with a head like his should be, even the rippling of the river ten yards away was deafening, the thought of the paddles beating up and down on the cloth was enough to make him positively ill. He needed water though, but for the moment could not think of where he could get it. The river was out of the question apart from the noise, this stretch below the ironworks was tainted. The nearest drinking fount was just within the western gatehouse - miles away. No. Not miles away really, more like twenty paces. Painfully he got to his feet and staggered through the gate ignoring the smirk that the guard detail gave him. Standing bright and cheerful in full infantry armour, the sun reflecting inconsiderately off each polished piece of steel, they had clearly spent a sober mid-summer night. The font sat in a little square just off the via Principia, the wooden benches almost full of men and women who, like him, had made this first step towards recovery. Belatedly he felt at his belt. "Blessings on you Epona!" His cup still hung there. Shakily he filled it, poured some into his hand to bathe his face and gratefully sucked in the rest. It was inelegant, noisy, but for the moment he ignored the presence of company and simply enjoyed the slaking of a raging thirst.

"You enjoyed yourself too, my friend?"

Ian slowly swivelled his head, "Dunben? Yes. I didn't see you - forgive me, but I only just made it this far, now I need to sit for a while."

Dunben leaned back on the bench with the virtuous smirk of a man who has no hangover, in the midst of those who have - and he was in the mood for conversation.

"Well what did you think of the Druid's tale yesterday?"

A brief "Hm?" was the only reply.

"We're all citizens of the Land of Camelod, my Friend. Land of fable. Land of joy."

"I don't see a lot of joy around here."

"The mead has soured your judgement, Ian." Dunben had taken Medoc's prognostications very seriously, he was proud of Windubro and the idea that it would become even more glorious was very satisfying. He could not resist sharing his thoughts with someone and Ian, regardless of his deplorable state, would have to provide the audience.

"I was born a few miles from here, you know." Ian shook his head and regretted it instantly, "Yes, my father and his brothers had a house and five acres just over to the north east. We were Coritani, but when King Cunoval became our overlord, no Catuvellauni noble came to claim our small farm for his own. So we scratched a living there at the side of the forest. Our cow grazed the field - what wasn't fenced off for roots and beans - our pigs rooted in the forest, we had chicken cages, half an acre of wheat and another of barley. Then every year when the salmon run began, we all came to the banks of the Trent and built our fish traps. It was just a little down stream from the docks, there. We could catch and smoke enough salmon to last all year. Nobody else seemed to ever fish here in those days." He had Ian's attention now, he could sense a tale in the offing, and another cup of cold water had calmed his headache a little.

Dunben's arm stretched out and his finger marked a circle around them, "It was all fields then. Fields and forest - and game in plenty. I said that we scratched a living, but that's not really true, we never went hungry and I know that after Cunoval's tax collectors had visited Ratas every year my cousins there passed the winter on very short commons indeed., but he wouldn't leave the township and join us at the side of the forest - he could have cleared some acres for himself without affecting our field, but he was wary of the men of the woods. I told him that me and my five brothers had made short work of the few that had crossed us, but it made no difference. Truth is, I think he was afraid of the forest and the tree spirits even more than the men o' the woods.

"Anyway, about six years ago we came down as usual and there was Windubro!" Dunben, sniffed and gave a little laugh, "Well not Windubro exactly, there were the four great ditches, thundering great logs set up on end behind them, mud and dirt everywhere and a miserable crowd of southern Catuvellauni. Wet, mucky and working like sodden slaves in all that mud. We couldn't understand it - and we sloped off pretty quick believe me. If there was one thing that was certain it was that they were short of labour for whatever they were building here - we didn't intend to be enslaved along with the southerners.

"We kept an eye on the place though, and we watched the walls completed - and if we climbed a tree up there," Dunben made a move as if to point to the exact spot and then realised that the tree line was a long way further back than it had been then, "somewhere, you could see over the walls and there were lots and lots of these little wooden houses. Lots of them."

"There's only a few hundred, Dunben."

The man's voice rose in pitch, "'Only a few hundred'. Did you hear yourself? Where were you living a couple of years back that you find a couple of hundred wooden houses unremarkable?"

Ian shrugged apologetically, "Sorry, but you get used to it."

"We-ell maybe you do at that, but that's my point now, isn't it? Five years ago it was nothing, but mud and misery - now. Look you," stopping to look around. "What do you see, Ian? Wooden houses - and you only saw dark mud and wattle huts before, stone clad roads, stone built houses, flowing water, bathouses, watermills, forges, ships, docks - and under your hearthstone now?"

Ian's face taughtened suddenly, "Eh?"

"Oh don't you mind man., but I'll tell you what I've got - although it's somewhere safer than the hearthstone. I've got three hundred silver denarii, over a thousand sesterces and there's other have far more than that. Could you have pointed to a man around here that had one silver piece to his name five years ago? No." His head bobbed soberly and his lips pursed.

"No. And that's what I've been getting at. In five years Windubro's come from muddy field to this. The Druids are right. It is a miracle town and I would not doubt any forecast at all, I wouldn't. Another five years, see - and what will you be, eh? Overseer of three or four fulling mills, perhaps and a wealthy man."

"Nah, nah," Ian's hangover had disappeared and he had not noticed its' flight, "They've got to weave a lot more cloth and spin a lot more yarn before that can happen."

"You think that isn't going to happen? I heard Caionac talking to the other centurions last night - while you were getting stewed. They reckon that those chieftains will bring us nearly a hundred thousand Cornovi to new settlements along the rivers, how much cloth d'you think they could produce for your fulling mills?" A brief confirmative nod of the head announced his own satisfaction with the prognostication. "Three or four times what we ship out now, eh?"

"Windubro and Cantodunon have come a long way in a short time ... And they'll both go a lot further now we have a name blessed by the Gods and famed in history. Camelod! What a ring that has to it man! The land of Camelod. And then, mebbe, the Island of Camelod! What would you think of that, then?"

"I think I'm hungry."

"Ach! You're a heathen, man."

The iron that was worked in Windubro and Camulodunon was dug out of the ground in a number of different localities and it varied in quality and utility. Camulodunon was conveniently placed for the very large deposits that were spread along the ridge to the east of the town; Windubro's iron came from up river on the Trent. None of the sites had watermills capable of working the big blowing engines that had been constructed in the towns and so the blooms of rough iron were produced in the traditional manner on small hearths with hand operated bellows. These crude lumps contained a great deal of impurities and had to be refined by heating and pounding in the larger bloomeries in Windubro and Cantodunon. The lumps of coarse iron were small though, no larger than ten or fifteen pounds and they were easy to transport in barges or on wagons. The first day after the town holiday ironmaking underwent a significant change. Heron had built a furnace with a twelve foot tall chimney to increase the draft and had then decided to improve matters by linking it to a water-driven blowing engine. The intention was to reduce the iron ore more quickly, driving off the impurities, and produce the large blooms needed for their large iron products without having to go through the first stage of making small coarse blooms in the outlying sites.

The first work done in the new furnace took place just two days after the inauguration of Camelod. A shipment of small blooms was brought to the bloomery and about fifty pounds laid in the bottom of the furnace. The charcoal was fired and the waterwheel engaged to raise and lower the wooden pistons that acted as bellows. Heron had introduced two new ideas with this furnace, fitted over the top of the normal Roman bowl type furnace was a nine foot chimney hung on chains so that it could be swung to one side when it was time to lift out the bloom. In addition to that he was trying a technique recently transmitted to him from Alexandria by an old friend, the iron blooms and charcoal were layered with small pieces of limestone. The charcoal was lit, the chimney swung into the blast of flames rising from the hearth and then settled into place. After a quarter of an hour the charge was glowing red, a half hour more and slag began to drip out of the hole in the side of the bowl and into the place cut in the sand for it. The blooms must be redhot now, reacting with the flames and the limestone, but well before the workmen were ready to thrust their iron rods into the fire and manipulate the lumps of iron into one large lump, the charge became white hot and a slow trickle of fire ran out of the slag hole and over the top of the solidifying slag. The iron had melted.

Heron stared at the liquid bemusedly, he had melted iron once or twice before, but it had taken hours and the quantity had been small - enough to make a small bracket or a god's head. The stream that issued from the blazing coals and spread rapidly over the rest of the bowl, was thin running and would have filled a bucket - if he had had a bucket capable of containing the fiery stream. He halted the blowing immediately and they all gathered round until the molten iron had set and was cool enough to wrestle onto the bloomery floor with iron bars. Then it was quenched with water and the workshop filled with great clouds of steam and a strong sulphurous smell. Three men with tongs lifted it up onto an anvil near the doorway and one of them struck it with a heavy hammer until it cracked and a third of it dropped to the floor again. It was still too hot to handle, but at least it was small enough to drag to the river and push it into a shallow basin cut in the bank where the blacksmith cooled his own finished work.

Eventually it was cold enough to pick up and Heron examined it critically. The fractured surface was finely crystalline and grey, with the interior of shiny gas holes gleaming slightly gold. The underside of the once flowing metal had faithfully reproduced the texture and seams of the fire bricks that formed the floor of the forge; in fact, he noted, the metal had run just as well as the finest statuary bronze, shallowing out to a broad section at the edge that was thinner than his little finger. Cast iron.

Hastily he picked up a wax tablet from his own workbench and noted down every factor that he could remember and that might be relevant to what they had just produced by accident - and then, after instructing his men to disconnect the blower and rely on the chimney induced draft for the time being - so that they could get on with the intended task of making large blooms, went off to his house to think. The thought at the front of his mind well before he started walking, was that one way or another, this discovery was going to bring him and Camelod a great deal of gold. To his knowledge iron had never been melted so readily before - that was the effect of the chimney and the machine blower -, but the fluidity of the molten metal? That must be due to the lime!

Heron had plenty of experience in casting bronze and on today's showing, casting iron would be no more difficult - probably easier. Iron was cheap! Would it be good enough for coulter blades, for ploughs? Tools? Weapons - ballista darts surely, it didn't matter if those shattered on impact. What else.

"Cooking pots." It was two days later, Gregory and Myrcal had been discussing Heron's discovery for most of that time. It seemed obvious to both of them that there must be a

product that cast iron was ideal for. This was a totally unknown process outside of Heron's workshop (apart from the occasional accidental melting of a small part of the bloom), and there had to be something that it was good for. She was convinced that it was an inauguration gift from Lugh, god of invention and art - amongst other things. He would not have given them such a blessing if it had no practical value. Gregory was not a particularly God fearing man - anybody's God -, but he too was sure that being able to melt large amounts of iron must have a strong commercial value ... So far they had only thought of products that were being made on the forges in the traditional manner. Substituting cast iron for these would have very little benefit - it might be cheaper to produce, but that was competing against their own forges - and, in any case, the substitution might not perform as well as forged iron and steel. They needed a new product.

Myrcal was just on her way out of the upstairs office to issue instructions for the evening meal when she stopped in the doorway, turned to face her husband with a look of triumph and, "Cooking pots!

"Everybody needs a cooking pot, bronze ones are much too expensive for ordinary households and they don't stand the fire as well as the iron ones -, but iron ones are made from sheet, beaten into shape and riveted - they are expensive too and, after a time, they leak. Ours do!

"Cast iron pots will be much faster to make, in different sizes." She positively danced with excitement, "Gregory, I'll wager I can sell thousands - tens of thousands. And who can compete with us? Nobody."

"Rome will copy the method sooner or later, they always do."

"Then you and Drusus and Lucius must build your security network as soon as possible - and make a branch of it responsible for preserving our own secrets." She paused leaning on the doorway while she thought the matter through, "The new towns will be up river or Why not on the Severn? Is there iron ore anywhere near there?"

"There must be, Myrcal, it's a long river and the Cornovii are not short of iron tools - just short of smiths to work the iron, they must buy their iron goods from someone fairly local to them, and it's not us."

"Yes, yes, of course. Well the new lands are well away from the traders of Gaul and Rome .."

Gregory interrupted, "We don't have many traders from Rome."

"Oh we will have, Dear. We will, just as soon as we can start making those iron pots in towns out of the way of the traders and merchants. Everything, but the finished product will be hidden away from them - it'll be years before any Gaul or Roman learns to cast iron like us."

Although much given to sudden enthusiasms himself, Gregory was aware of the number of times his own 'innovations' had led into dead-ends where continued efforts produced absolutely nothing, as the result of some obvious, but unconsidered fact. He gently reminded Myrcal, "We haven't produced any 'cast iron' ourselves yet - just a puddle on the workshop floor."

"I know that."

"And do we have men skilled enough to cast pots?"

"We have bronze workers." She stamped her foot in exasperation, "Stop it Gregory. You know just as well as I do that you and Heron can solve that sort of problem easily. You're just being obstructive."

"No Myrcal. Just cautious ... All right, perhaps too cautious. I'll tell Heron to re-design a furnace to produce molten iron only and start teaching men to make pots. Lucius can survey a new site for the foundry away from curious Roman and Gallic eyes - and then we'll see to our security."

"Will that suit your impatient heart?"

"Beautifully." Myrcal's smile was a little self satisfied as she moved out of the doorway and started towards the kitchens, "We eat in two hours. If you haven't already invited Drusus and Lucius, you ought to do it now."

Chapter eight

November 39 AD Windubro

There were at least ten iron mines within three or four miles of the Severn's banks, all of them small workings, but that was nothing to do with the richness of the deposits it was simply that not one of them had more than five or six miners and an equal number of men involved in washing, weathering and roasting the ore. It was quite enough to supply the present needs of the local tribes - and there was very little demand for exports. After the mid-summer meeting and the declaration of Camelod, there had followed a very busy period of negotiation, migration, adjustment of property such as cattle, sheep, pigs, crops already planted, pottery manufacture and building.

It was chaotic. The plans that Gregory had for the governance of the towns and the development of the various departments under their Secretaries simply had no time to be examined and refined - for the time being things had to bumble on in the same manner as before. Now, however there was an increasing number of applications for citizenship and admission to settlements of the civilised, Windubron sort. Five thousand men and women sought admission within thirty days of the chieftains returning to their tribes - and the housing had not been built. Lucius had surveyed two sites for ironworking settlements, both of them on the Severn and within fifteen miles of each other - and a start had been made to cut the board for houses of the type common in Cantodunon and Windubro, but there was no road from the Trent to the Severn and transport of the timber was slow.

Sixty miles of road was being laid relatively quickly, just seven feet wide - on the argument that the loaded wagons would all be going one way for the first few months, unladen wagons would leave the road and make way for the timbers, tools, weapons that were being used to make and protect the new settlements. By the time it was half complete and the timber wagons were delivering their loads at the rate of ten a day it was harvest time and everybody's concern focussed on bringing in the wheat and barley and straw. Focussed on those tasks, but making very little headway in them for Samain (the end of July and beginning of August) was bleak and wet. A cold light drizzle persisted well through the harvest month and delayed it until August was nearly done. The workshops carried on cutting boards, but they had to be stacked in the empty granaries to keep dry until the space was needed for grain. No field work took place though and no transportation of the board because the journey took four days there and four back and the towns could not afford to lose eight days if the weather should change suddenly.

Enough timber had been delivered for housing five hundred civilians at each site; the houses were laid down in the traditional blocks of six houses in plots sixty feet by sixty six

and in two rows parallel to the left bank. The rows had a roadway twenty feet wide between them and another the same width between the one row and the river. A roadway in name only, for the time being it consisted of river pebbles hammered into the soil. A small fort was constructed for each settlement, overlooking the river on the down river sides and a clear space of one hundred yards maintained around each. Two centuries of infantry and one of cavalry were to be stationed in each of these and one of the new large semaphores raised on a thirty foot tower. Work had started on installing the waterwheels prefabricated in Windubro when the wagons stopped arriving, but by then the forts were manned by half their intended complement who, in turn were kept busy erecting their ballistas, constructing the rest of the semaphore line, settling the new citizens and supervising the road building.

Apart from the actual housing and straight roads, the only sign of sophistication was a broad paved area flanked by marker posts defining a forum, council house and offices. They were not expected to be ready for another six months, and then they would be built in timber, not stone.

Gradually the tasks were completed and then there were nine days of comparative idleness until the wagons began rolling down to the Severn bank and chaos broke out again. By now there were plenty of new citizens who knew how to make the foundations and fit together the wooden huts - and the legion's work became less fractured, so that they concentrated on the main roads into the settlements "Severnside" to the north and "Riverdown" downstream, completing the leats and watermills and constructing the furnaces and docks.

Not all the Cornovii wished to exchange their scattered, thatched, mudwalled huts for neat villages of wooden houses and a fairly regimented life with food, clothes and tools guaranteed., but the entertainment that had been bestowed on the Chieftains had been well received and all, but two were enthusiastic in promoting the idea that the Cornovii should give up their present mode of living and join together in settlements and townships. Citizenship was the qualification to enter and live in a village or settlement and an oath of loyalty to Camelod was required. It was no minor oath, but one made to the God Lugh in groups of a hundred - and the penalty for betraying the oath was clearly stated - drowning under weighted boards, or strangling. So far as manpower for the legion was concerned, Lucius followed his usual practise of only seeking young men between the ages of sixteen and twenty one, older men who he considered were less amenable to discipline, were incorporated into the Town Guard and responsible for garrison duty, fire fighting and policing. In fact every male between fourteen and fifty trained for five hours every twenty days and the women of the town practised with the wall ballistas.

Despite the hard work of building the two new settlements and breaking new ground for the winter frosts to crack and lighten, the new population lived in unaccustomed luxury, being housed in weather-tight houses, eating twice a day regularly and being issued with decent cloth for winter clothes. By Imbolc the worst of a dry hard winter was over, the ground started to thaw out and it was time to take the harrows onto the great fields and form a seed bed for the grain, peas, beans and other crops. Severnside and Riverdown held civilian populations of five thousand each with volunteers from Windubro and Cantodunon forming a fifth of the citizens.

In and around the two towns Lucius and his officers were busy training seven thousand new recruits - and having a terrible time. It was unfair to label conditions as chaotic, but certainly the order which had clad the administration of town and legion previously had been badly torn. The legion was scattered over the country, building roads, leveling tow paths along parts of the Trent and Severn, building leats for waterwheels and aquaducts (in wood) to supply the settlements with water for drinking and hygiene, training new recruits, manning signal posts and surveying the land. It was very little better for the civilians, craftsmen were building and working in the new settlements, training men and boys in the new technologies that existed nowhere else in Britain - and still attempting to maintain a respectable amount of production for home and export.

A letter from Drusus came at this time, it dealt with the matters they had discussed the year before and informed the Lords of Camelod that he had found a good man to provide them with intelligence from the continent. A Tuscan merchant whose family bitterly remembered the proscriptions of the Triumvirate, when they had lost most of their estates in Italy, his grand-father had rebuilt the family property in Gaul, but insisted that they were still Tuscans with a lineage that pre-dated Rome. Gregory, with his own memory of the later proscriptions under Tiberius, nevertheless found it amazing that hatred could be transmitted through generations in this way even when - as was quite clear - they had prospered under the emperors. Drusus's letter made it quite clear that this was the case however; he had investigated the man discreetly, but quite thoroughly, making use of his Jewish contacts - and he was buying his services. The cost was to be one hundred thousand sesterces every quarter, not cheap by any means, but the man had spies in ten major cities - most of them ports. Drusus would forward reports that were apposite, whenever they appeared.

"Four hundred thousand a year!" Lucius was horrified and affronted, "Do we need to spend that amount of money, Gregory?"

"I don't know old friend," Gregory's shoulders lifted in a shrug of resignation, "but Drusus is no fool and certainly, with Roman aspirations looking across the channel, it is necessary right now. Maybe not so important in a few years, but right now I say we bite our lips and spend the money. From the sound of it we are already in Drusus's debt.

"There is something more, ' Tell Lucius that I have also found the right man to help him in establishing and running your own internal intelligence system.' It sounds much better than 'Spies' doesn't it?" Gregory, traced his way back to his place in the letter. " 'Let me know if and when you want him over there, his price is a straight fee of seven hundred and fifty auri.' That's about it, except that he suggests that you employ him as 'private secretary' which will explain being closeted with him for hours at a time."

'Hmph! Thank you., but there's no question of starting him now, I'm up to my eyeballs in paperwork, supervising the intake of the new recruits, extending the surveys into the new land - and I'm not at all happy about the organisation of the weapons stores and ordering. It'll be easier next year, say January or February."

"I agree, but let's not put a date to it until the end of this year - there's no desperate need to rush at it." And so matters rested for four months and another six months ... and another.

Although the land about their new territory seemed peaceful after the attacks on the Brigante, five separate squadrons of heavy cavalry (400 men in all), roamed the land. They were the only units in battle-ready condition, the remaining units of cavalry, infantry and ballistas not already involved in building, were being employed to train the new influx. Every man was engaged in the task regardless of whether they were fully trained themselves or not and consequently the recruits who had been in training when the Brigante precipitated Camelod's explosive expansion, found themselves in charge of small squads of Cornovii, initiating them into the mysteries and boredom of drill. It was inevitable that men (youths really), who had recently been tediously and endlessly pounding the drill grounds were tempted to take advantage of the new men's ignorance, but Lucius's senior officers managed to catch the most flagrant cases of bullying and put a stop to it. Exhausting as it was, this period had the benefit of revealing several very promising potential optios amongst the earlier recruits.

June AD 40

By mid-summer, just twelve months after the momentous naming of Camelod and the burst of expansion, things had settled down. The exchequer was poorer by five million sesterces - measured in lost exports and actual expenditure -, but the two new settlements

Celtic Empire - Camelod

could be described as towns now and, in fact, had larger populations than Cantodunon since they were not limited by strong walls and ditches. The forums were being built, the council houses finished and the first elections under the scheme that Secretary Daffyd and his clerks had developed, were due to be held in two month's time at the end of July - Lughnasa. Workshops were slowly getting into production as craftsmen from Windubro and Cantodunon trained suitable Cornovii. The flocks and herds were now in the charge of men and women who had no liking for the new towns. All livestock owned by those tribesmen and women who had moved into the town had been bought by Camelod - the remaining herdsmen and women looked after all sheep and cattle and in return would pay no taxes on their own animals. As a matter of security, small groups of houses were built for them - five or six houses within an eight foot fence and a iron beacon erected in case of emergency. These compounds also served as paddocks for the ponies that the increased size of the herds and flocks had made imperative. No man could be expected to act as shepherd to one thousand sheep without some means of rapid transport.

In August of last year the road between Severnside and Down river and from there to the Trent had been completed and widened to allow wagons to pass each other. Wrought iron work from the drop forges, great hanks of wool yarn, fresh sawn timber all began to stream towards Windubro and part of the flow from there by barges to Cantodunon. Freestone blocks needing very little working to make them suitable for building, traveled the same road and the piles of iron blooms ready for the iron foundry grew until the quantity became an embarrassment and something of an obstacle on the riverside road, but it was October before Heron perfected his new furnace and was ready to transport the first one to Severnside. It had been a difficult job, the temperatures reached inside the furnace was much higher than for bloom production and the refractory lining of sandstone had to be made much thicker. The shape of a bloomery furnace proved awkward too and the eventual shape arrived at allowed for the slag to be tapped off from a hole a foot above the bosh that received the molten iron. An added complication had been Heron's habit of insulting his workmen - even hitting them when he became excited. The Celts were not accustomed to such treatment - they were metal workers after all and demanded proper acknowledgement of their importance. So far as Heron was concerned, no one had importance beyond himself and when the work went badly (as it often did with this new and difficult technique), he threw words and fists about with no consideration for their effect at all.

But just in time for Samain the furnace was installed, tested and the first charge of fuel, limestone and one hundred pounds of small blooms were loaded. Channels were made in the sand floor of the foundry, leading to a row of six moulds dug down below the floor surface. Care had been taken with the making of the cooking pot moulds, leading the

feeders into the base of the mould and forming slender risers and even more slender gas holes from the upper side of the mould. It seemed that the whole of Severnside was there for the first melting and pouring. They stood around the outside of the three sided building and watched the great blowers lift and fall with every rotation of the shaft from the watermill. They rose to a count of twenty on the lifting pegs of the shaft and fell for a count of fifteen impelled by gravity and the weight of the stones laid on top of the wooden piston. They blew in turn, one lifting when the other fell and then vice versa, so that the noisy blast into the glowing coals and charge of iron blooms was almost continuous and a steady stream of sparks and flame leapt from the top of the chimney. It was fascinating - it was fun and Heron grew increasingly agitated as the enthusiastic crowd grew. The flames were a deep red now and he judged the time almost ripe.

A clay plug was broken away and the white hot slag spouted out and into the bowl of black sand in front of the furnace. It dribbled away and the flow of slag ceased. Then a lower plug a quarter of the way round the circular hearth was broken off in its turn and to his great relief molten metal streamed into the channel prepared for it in the sand and then down into the bottom of the mould. Nothing could be seen for a few minutes, but the flow of brilliant fluid and spouts of steam and smoke issuing from the hump of sand that covered the top of the mould. The spouts grew fiercer, whistling out of the reeds that prevented sand blocking the gas vents until, quite suddenly, the metal flowed out of a larger hole at the side, bearing a crust of slag and debris on its surface and still glowing faintly. Swiftly the flow from the furnace was diverted into another channel and mould by shovelling sand from one channel to the other. That mould filled up and still the iron flowed, Heron had it directed into a shallow depression in the sand, where it formed a platten two feet across before the flow ceased.

Now there was the tedious business of waiting for the castings to cool to the point where they could be taken out of their sand casing.

It was not something that one stood around for. Heron allowed four hours to pass before he risked opening them up and in the meantime wandered down to the river. In the last year he had been introduced to the art of fishing with a net on a long pole and a paddle on another long pole. The intention was to drive the fish into the net with the paddle. The river was shallow close to the bank, but there was still enough depth to make visibility difficult - and the calculation of angles and the relative positions of fish, net and paddle a real art. To Gregory's amazement he had not given up in disgust after two weeks of failure. He'd sworn a lot - the Celts still did not understand his obscenities - but carried on trying. Now, he could usually produce a brown trout, or salmon inside an hour or so from the crystal water upstream of the town - and there was no shortage of fish, it was simply a matter of

finding a stupid one. Gregory wondered how long it would be before the supply of stupid fish ran out - or if they ever would. Judging from the unwontedly peaceful expression on Heron's face when he was fishing, it probably would not matter. That was another source of amazement.

Heron came back with a net holding three large trout and viewed the impatient audience with satisfaction. A curt nod to the workmen and the sand was dug away from around the pots and the solidified 'feed' or gate to the bottom. A sharp blow with a chisel separated the two. The metal was still too hot to handle, but the pots were dragged up out of the foundry floor with iron bars and rolled out for inspection. They were still rough, with the riser and the stub of the gate attached, and the thin spikes where metal had entered the gas vents around the base - the pots were cast mouth down -, but they were absolutely whole. There were no apparent casting flaws, no cold shuts and no blow holes, an hour's work with a saw and then a rub down with coarse sand and they would be finished. Two big cauldrons one foot across at the mouth and one and a quarter feet at the belly.

"Good work Heron." He looked round and up at Gregory who had entered unnoticed, Heron shrugged, but made no attempt to hide the pride he felt.

"Well my boy, how many more do you want?"

"Myrcal says she can ship and sell five hundred a month."

"But that's ... that's" The Alexandrian stuttered while he tried to calculate the amount of iron needed for such a preposterous figure.

"About twelve tons of blooms every month, I know." Gregory leant forward a little to impart the next piece of information, "And we will be issuing them to the legion and the town's people.

"Altogether, old friend. You need to build bloomeries and foundries for fifteen tons a month at least." One eyebrow rose in query, "Can you do that in the next few months?"

A calculating look (never far away from Heron's shrewd features), was directed at the Lord of Camelod. "How much are we selling them for, then?"

"These big ones should fetch a hundred and fifty sesterces each."

"Seventy five thousand a month?"

"If you can produce them, there's even more to be made from smaller pots - say a tenth of this weight."

Gregory judged that there had been enough discussion of the value of their new product, he intended to be back in Windubro before noon the next day and there was long a ride ahead before the halfway signal station and a bed for the night. "Get men trained to operate this furnace and then start building more here and at Riverdown, Myrcal's estimate is based on orders that she has taken already. Once these pots reach Rome there's no knowing how many we'll need., but Lucius reckons that the iron quarries along the Severn can produce all the iron we'll ever need - if we can dig it out and process enough."

"It will take hundreds of men."

"We've **got** hundreds of men, Heron, believe me. Come on man - you're going to be richer than any of your old priestly enemies in Alexandria. Smile."

Heron smiled.

Cantodunon June AD41

It was remarkable, twenty six moons had waxed and waned and throughout all the turmoil in Camelod there had been no real threat to its security. The Brigante had been quiet, Venutius had disappeared, Cuneval still ruled at Camulodunon and his sons had kept their distance from the two towns, and Camelod's citizenry had swollen to twenty five thousand adults and an army of eleven thousand. The seven thousand who had been in training on the Severn were now scattered around the country, the small fortresses at the two towns on the Severn, Windubro, Cantodunon and signal posts and small garrison towers at all the larger settlements along the Trent. All trained now, but the great majority lacking any experience of warfare. In addition there were two cohorts of the ballista cavalry - boys between twelve and sixteen mounted on ponies and armed with the small, but deadly hand ballistas in training at Cantodunon or on permanent posting there. Camelod was already a commercial and martial force to be reckoned with.

Windubro and Cantodunon had changed somewhat, being given over almost entirely to the legions. Unlike the Roman legionaries Camelod's were allowed - encouraged - to marry, so that the practice of accommodating the men in huts rather than barracks had

continued. The civilian towns lay outside the walls, organised in neat rows parallel to the Trent and five hundred yards at the nearest point to the town walls. Riverdown and Severnside had thrived, fully half of their men working in the iron quarries or in Heron's new blast furnaces at Severnside, producing cast iron pots, plough coulter blades, weapon points, or in the forges or the drop forge. The iron and steel works - and the bronze - were all bounded by a tall palisade that was broken at two points only, by gatehouses. Lucius and Gregory had made sure that it would be difficult to spy on any of the processes within. Around the towns spread the communal fields, horse paddocks and meadows. The herds of sheep and cattle were mainly owned by the towns now, bought from those Cornovii who wanted to become town dwelling citizens and they were looked after by the Cornovii who wished to follow their old life and who still owned their own livestock. Acting as herdsmen for the towns relieved them from tax or providing labour for the fields - and they still shared the citizen distributions at the quarterly Celtic celebrations.

Last Lughnasa, Camelod had its first election. The citizens of Windubro and Camulodunon had known what to expect and had helped to educate the new citizens in this strange custom. The result had been fairly successful and a total of seventy town councillors had been elected to the four major and three smaller councils. They were small numbers and would have been smaller if the original idea of one councillor for every five thousand head had been maintained. That proportion would be something to consider later when the population was greater than the thirty five thousand it stood at now. Daffyd's secretariat was functioning well in instructing the new councillors in what was expected of them - few of them had any clear idea what a councillor did. It was clearly a position of some prestige and in the main that had been the driving force behind the men and women who had put themselves forward for election. Now they settled down to regular meetings (which were more like lectures at the start), in the seven council chambers that had been made ready in the four towns and three of the larger settlements - larger by comparison with the other settlements only, even Riverdown had three or four times the population of the largest settlement.

Gregory and Daffyd had decided that there would be a twelve month's delay before the councillors would be called upon to elect the senate, which would consist of twelve at this time and, for now, would double as the High Council. Only six senators would be elected whilst it performed this dual task, the four secretaries and the legion's two primus would complete the complement. The structure of government was being laid down - it remained to see how it would perform when parties formed amongst the councillors and elections became competitive. At the moment elections were a very peaceable affair and the scenes in the Forums bore little resemblance to the violence and frequent carnage displayed in Rome on election days. It was a situation that Gregory and Lucius were grateful for.

If governance was progressing well, so was the organisation of the army. The principias at both Windubro and Cantodunon had a full complement of clerks, some brought in on contract to set up departments and teach the Camelodians the skills and practices needed; some as new citizens paid according to rank. Lucius now had no worries about the operation of the pensions, medical treatment, maintenance of the legion and cohort shrines, materiel and personal supplies, or any of the multitude of organisational functions that the army required to operate efficiently and whilst looking to the welfare of its soldiers. It had taken some argument to persuade clerks used to the Roman legions, that food, clothing and equipment were not to be charged against pay, unless the scheduled usage was exceeded. Equipment lost in battle would be charged, that was the same in both armies. It avoided the temptation to renew weapons and clothing, by 'losing' them during conflict - and it provided an incentive to rescue weapons and equipment that might otherwise be lost for as the corollary to charges on losses, rewards would be made for rescued, servicable equipment. It had seemed a good idea at the time, but the loss of half a century of heavy cavalry, while attempting to recover weapons from a Brigante tribe when they should have withdrawn in good order, resulted in a severe ruling on when the action was appropriate.

Lucius's main triumph lay in obtaining a retired primus from the Second Augustus to run a staff college for Camelod's senior officers. Septimus Causta was a typical primus pilus, chief centurion of a legion's first Cohort. Such men had at least twenty five years behind them when, and if they retired (which they did with a lump sum of around six hundred thousand sesterces). It was a rank that arrived no earlier than about halfway through a man's service, and the primus would be posted from one legion to another every twelve months - so that by the time he retired he might very well have served in that rank in ten or twelve legions. There was a wealth of experience to be tapped, many never retired, but stayed within the legion for thirty, forty years or more. Septimus though, was done with fulltime soldiering, he had a wife and two boys, a discharge bonus that would have bought a hundred acres of good land - but he had no liking for farming. He leapt at the chance of running a school for officers when it was offered by an old friend of Lucius's, and he and his family arrived in Cantodunon in March to take up residence in one of the stone built town villas with its own bathhouse. Pay was not really an issue for him, Lucius offered a respectable sum, two thousand a year with the house and weekly rations for his family and four servants (paid for by the town) and no taxes. At forty five Septimus could not have expected such luxury and respect. His rank was tribune.

The staff college opened in April with a total of eight officers. The primus had never run a college before, but it was really very little different from what he had been doing for a large

part of his service career in a less concentrated manner. There was no curriculum nor even a term set for the courses - those were details that would define themselves as the months went by. If there were occasions when the old soldier was not quite sure what should happen next, he was cunning enough not to reveal them. Lucius had been worried that Septimus would be contemptuous of his charges, who were only three quarters of the age of equivalent ranks in the Roman army and had very much less battle experience. Septimus however had a strong paternal streak in him (and Lucius recognised that many of the primus pilus he had known in his own service had much the same approach to young officers) and took great pride in the achievements of his class. Practical exercises were easy to arrange, the legion made frequent raids into the hill country to the north and west, and many of these were made by the staff officers from now on as scheduled field exercises.

Cantodunon July AD41

Gwillam strode along one of the sheep tracks that so bespattered the hillsides around the town that it was possible to walk from one landmark to another without stumbling through unevenly grazed grasses and tussocks. As head shepherd Gwillam did not need to stay with the flocks overnight, those days were gone and nights were spent in his comfortable house down in the town, with Margit and the three children, Brennan, Connan and Tumalt., but there was only one way to ensure that the massive flocks were thriving and that none had suffered from wild dogs, pine martins or men o' the woods - that was to visit the little bothies where the shepherds slept (intermittently), with their dogs. A typical bothy would be a temporary building of withies and turves, about ten feet across and large enough for a man and four of the rangy British sheep dogs. Large animals almost hip high to a average sized man, with blunt snouts and a ruff of thick protective hair around the throats and shoulders - more than a match for most marauding animals and a threat to the life of any man who crept the dark hillsides at night.

Camelod now had flocks of sheep that were measured in several thousands, mostly town property and marked with blue woad, but some of the men had kept their own flocks rather than the silver coins that had been offered when they became citizens. After two mild winters in succession, all the flocks had prospered and the men who had refused the coins congratulated themselves on their fortune. Shearing this last month had been exhausting, even with the introduction of the Roman shears. The old way of plucking and combing by hand was slow, but it had the advantage of spreading the task over two summer months as the wool loosened in clumps. Shepherds found it strange to look out over a small ocean of shorn backs rather than the more familiar shaggy creatures that were shedding wool unevenly.

Three thousand fleeces had gone to the towns' washing and carding houses ready for spinning, more than ten thousand raw fleeces had been shipped directly to Gesoriacum in Gaul. Now the barges from Windubro and the settlements up river were bringing in their loads for reshipping, June and July were busy days for the town and the port. There would be a brief space of twenty days or so and then every man and woman (including the legion and half the shepherds), would be reaping the wheat, barley and oats, stooking it, carting it, threshing it and finally transporting it to the granaries for distribution throughout the country as it was needed. The remains of last year's crop would have been cleared out of the granaries and sold across the channel by the time the space was needed.

It usually meant about thirty days of double duty for the shepherds and cowherds, but then the months that followed were easy until the snow came. Ploughing and seeding needed no assistance from the livestock keepers, iron and steel coulter blades and a plenty of draught cattle made the first a task that only needed half the population, and seeding was now carried out by dragging a special cart behind horses - it cut a row, a boy sitting at the back dropped seed along it and a timber dragging along behind closed the earth over it. Two hundred men could seed the three square miles that Cantodunon had under cultivation in less than twenty days - given good dry weather.

It was 'Shepherds' holiday' now and Gwillam was walking for the sheer pleasure of it. He could be fairly confident that there would be no disputes about this man or that man being over-worked, or of neglect or violence between men who had dealt with double sized flocks all night and then had to turn to and shear the sheep. The hills were on his left as he walked south and parallel to the river. They had been heavily wooded a few years ago, but the growth in charcoal burning and iron ore extraction had thinned the old woods down by a dismaying extent and the coppicing that was being employed now to maintain a steady supply of charcoal had only been in place two years. The coppices of ash and beech bore poles of a thickness a man could almost span with fingers and thumb, it would be another three years before harvesting could begin. Nevertheless, the smoke from the charcoal would be drifting through the leafless trees in another three months, lending a magical air to them that Margit would have appreciated - if she could ever be persuaded to walk so far. His wife had the reluctance of the plump woman to walking uphill. Not so much because of the effort of climbing uphill, but because of the discomfort in descending again, as her body thumped down from one foot to the other.

Gwillam's dogs stayed at home when he walked amongst the flocks, for the shepherds' dogs were jealous of their charges - there were definite boundaries to each flock's territory, imposed more by the dogs than either man or sheep. A shepherd's dogs formed a pack whether there were two of them, or four or six (none of the town's shepherds

owned more than six dogs), the pack had a leader and all of them took turns to mark the limits of the territory claimed. The area bounded varied with the size of the pack and on the rare occasion that sheep wandered into the neighbouring territory, the whole pack went to bring them back - they behaved more like marauding warriors than guards. The incursion never lasted more than an hour or two or the neighbouring pack would have time to group and a battle would result - more often the offending sheep were back in minutes.

"Ho, Mangon! Did you have a good night?" Gwillam rounded the shoulder of a spur of hillside and greeted a shepherd crouched over a smokeless cooking fire. The man looked over his shoulder, but did not ignore his cooking - strips of mutton bacon on a green stick.

"Don't ask friend. Don't ask."

"What? Wildcats? Stray dogs?"

"Worse, worse", Shaking his head dolorously, "Diarrhoea! All bloody night." And then with a sudden hope in his voice, "Would you take a turn for me Gwillam? I could get some sleep then."

It was not the way that the head shepherd had intended to fill his day, but it was shepherds' holiday, he had nothing more urgent and Mangon's face was a picture of misery.

"Right my friend, but you can cut me a good handful of rashers from that bacon first."

Chapter nine

Cambria

AD41 January

Venutius was convinced now that the Gods had some special destiny for him. He stood on the flank of a valley and gazed down on a mess of spoil taken out of a series of holes. A few huts were dotted about and the inhabitants were herded together at the centre of this untidy looking village under the eyes and spears of his warrior band. For months he had wandered aimlessly across the lands of the Ordovices, acquiring plunder here and there, gradually becoming richer and, more importantly, becoming more powerful as small groups from his homeland joined him. The band was still small when it left the approximate border of the Ordovices and entered the lands of the Demata. These western tribes were of the old people, the Celts who had dwelt in Britain before the Britons invaded two hundred years or more before. Their huts were crude to his eyes, sunk partly into the earth, but he had to admit that they looked as though they would be warm in the coldest weather and bleakest winds. They were an unsophisticated people with no organised settlement of any size that he had come across. Nevertheless they had gold ornaments, The Brigantes had won small quantities to begin with, but as he had travelled along the valleys heading south west (and he had no idea what had put it in his mind to travel in that direction), the number of ornaments increased - in one village they had gathered a small sackful; almost ten pounds in weight.

1

When he started down the valley of the Cothi he had seen three golden eagles heading in the same direction. Adult golden eagles might fly in pairs, but never a trio. He felt short of breath at the wonder of it and with hope burning his chest they had followed the Cothi until they came to this ramshackle place. Dolaucothi. It was a gold mine!

Or rather it was a collection of pits that gold was extracted from and just thirty men to defend it. To do them justice, they had no need to defend it, the land was holy. The gleaming metal that would not tarnish! The stuff of holiness. Who would desecrate such a place merely to keep the gold for his own mundane reasons. Gold was for adorning the gods, the heroes and the sacrificial horses that were led at the start of each year to the tarn high above the valleys. The answer was, of course, Venutius would. He had his Gods, stronger Gods than these forsaken people had the ear of, and they had brought him here. He was grateful, - so grateful that he sacrificed the best of the valley bulls and burnt it whole without taking anything, but the heart for himself.

The gold was scattered through the rock and soil and needed great labour to harvest, but that was all right, the Demata would work for him. He already had twenty five pounds of

gold gathered on the way to this remote spot and supplemented by the five pounds that was found in a hut that appeared to serve as a repository for the miners.

A supply of gold and a band of forty warriors already. He could build a fortress here in the valley, control the mines and steadily increase his army. The army would not come here of course, nobody would come here except himself and his thirty warriors, they would build another fortress or camp in the Roman manner and keep control of their slave workers. It was ridiculous to see the desultory manner in which the mines had been worked. He would change that soon enough. How much could he extract in the next twelve months? Windubro was not forgotten; gold and the other plunder he could wrest from this land would build him a better army than before. Then ...ah, then he would erase the insult. Those boy soldiers and their machines could be overcome now that he knew of them and how they operated. Hardened warriors would make short work of them.

Venutius put his dreams of vengeance to one side for the time, scanning the land and deciding where he would place his fortress and where the barracks for his warriors. It was a pleasant land (Venutius was no brainless fighting man, he appreciated the beauty of woods and fields and hills), to the north east it rose to a ridge a thousand feet or so higher than the mines. Similar high ground surrounded the valley at a distance of about five miles except to the south

west, where the valley of the Cothi led down to the sea. There was plenty of rich grazing here and low, well wooded hills to provide fuel, building material and forage for goats and pigs. A smile creased his face, even a warrior prince had to be familiar with such mundane matters.

He ordered a hut built for himself and the most presentable (that really was not saying very much), woman in the village. Half a dozen sheep were roasting already.... the band would eat well from now on - until they surprised Windubro. In a year perhaps? Certainly not more than two - it all depended on how quickly he could gather good men about him.

September AD41, Cantodunon

Gregory called his High Council in the middle of the month. Ten of them sat around the table; Myrcal, Lucius, the four secretaries, Septimus Causta, Caionac (primus at Windubro), and Dungan (primus at Cantodunon, transferred from Windubro). Two clerks were in attendance one from the legion's principia and one from the praesidium. There had been no prior notice of what they were to discuss and only Myrcal was aware of what lay in Gregory's mind. He dealt first with the state of Camelod's army and commerce.

"Lucius will you report our military strength and readiness, please?"

Even without notice, Lucius had fully expected that he would be called upon first of all. He had done his homework the night before, comparing the maps, calling his clerks for their own reports on legion activities and he was ready.

"The infantry has a full legion fully trained, and two more cohorts suitable for the rear of the battle line, fifteen centuries of recruits with only six months training - just over seven and a half thousand in all. The heavy cavalry now has two cohorts fully trained..... and the boys - the ballista cavalry - one cohort. Two thousand and four hundred men - and boys." The councillors laughed, but they had seen the ballista cavalry at exercise and the laughter was in no way derogatory.

"The mobile ballistas have three cohorts - a total of three hundred and sixty machines and one thousand men all fully trained. Then, of course, we have the signals, scouts and messengers. We could expect to thrash a couple of Roman legions with an alia of auxiliary cavalry (they are no match for us), and ..."

Septimus interrupted, "Your pardon Lord Lucius, but do not forget that the Gallic cavalry are re-equipping with the four horned saddle. It's not as steady a platform as your stirrups, but it comes close - quite close."

"Right. I've seen the new Roman saddle, but we are still developing fighting techniques for stirrups that aren't possible with the saddle. I still say we could thrash them."

Septimus lifted his hand in acknowledgement of the point.

Lucius took up his report again, "The legion funds are in very good shape, the pension fund is growing and the men are debating whether to invest some part of it in trading - or not. There will be a bumper distribution at Samain as a result of increased production in the legionary workshops. We confirmed a large order last month from traders selling into the lower Germania tribes - swords and helmets ... Pretty helmets!" Lucius did not hold with any other adornment on a military helmet other than those demanded by rank and recognition of rank. "The legion's trading revenue (goods, booty and slaves), amounts to twelve million and the distributed donative from the fund will be five hundred for legionaries, one thousand for optio ranking, two thousand for centurion and so on, in the established pattern." For a moment or two Lucius fumbled with his wax tablets before finding the notes he was looking for. "Roads. The road between Severn and Trent is now

fit for two way wagon traffic and half that cost has been met by the syndicate who own the shipping rights for all metal goods from Severnside and Riverdown to the port here at Cantodunon." That contract had accounted for a large part of the legion's trading in this last quarter.

"The military road along the Trent now stretches well past the barge loading point at the Severn Station road and serves three cavalry posts at ten mile intervals. Hardened tracks, " These were improved trackways and animal paths that had been cleared of brush and major obstacles to provide swift passage for cavalry and slower passage for the narrow legionary wagons that carried weapons, rations and tools, "now amount to a network spreading west and north and approximating one hundred and fifty miles in total; maintenance of these is the responsibility of the cavalry and signal posts."

Standing back from the table he looked around, tucked his note tablet into his belt and said, "We have an efficient, effective and increasingly wealthy legion councillors. You can depend upon it." And he sat down.

Each of the councillors made reports on their particular concern, not all were as glowing as Lucius's, there were problems with Custom's duties and determining charges when a shipment was traded by a mixture of citizen and non-citizen shippers, ranking disputes amongst the civilian craftsmen and workers - which affected personal earnings, treatment of citizens who dodged the labour hours or taxes due to the towns and settlements (there would always be a percentage who were happy to subsist on the civilian ration and be invisible when civic tasks such as harvesting fell due). There had been a complete blockage in the river traffic down the Trent as a result of a bank collapse and the grounding and wreckage of a column of barges transporting goods to Windubro and trans-shipment. The question there was, "Who pays for the goods and compensation for the three deaths?", but outside these relatively small problems the towns were flourishing, Samain distribution was set for eight hundred sesterces for each ordinary citizen and proportionately more for the different rankings - matching the legion's scales. The exchequers of the towns and settlements would show an increase after distribution and the Camelod exchequer held ten million. When the last councillor sat down Gregory called for cups and jars of the two year honey wine.

"It has been a highly satisfactory year so far. We've increased our citizenry and our power - and overcome the expected disruption much more quickly than I had hoped for. Which says a great deal for your own effectiveness. My thanks to you all." He raised his own cup in salute.

"Now." Heads raised from their cups, the tone was serious and very likely presaged unpleasant news. Gregory caught the feeling of the council and was quick to allay their apprehension. "No, this is not a cause for great concern - well yes, concern, but not fear. I am going to propose a change in our 'foreign' policy.

"Every expansion so far has been brought about by the actions of others. Invasions, raids - even this last affair was initiated by Venutius's raid on the Cornovii. I am proposing that we change this and do some initiating of our own. We are in a position to do so; we have a strong and effective army, an increasing workforce and a large income of silver. However, instead of proceeding to expand by attacking and conquering neighbours as Rome does I suggest that we are more subtle and go about this expansion indirectly. The attack on the Brigante was as a result of their own actions, but otherwise, indirect expansion would work in much the same fashion. We select an area that would be a welcome addition to our lands and population - and which also has neighbouring tribes who are a threat (what tribe does not have such neighbours?) - whether an active threat as the Brigante were, or one that is dormant, but might be easily tempted into activity. When we have identified such a situation we do two things; the legion prepares battle plans and apportions troops and materiel to deal with the neighbours - and we send advisors to the people we wish to induct into Camelod, point out the threat their neighbours present and state that we are proposing to remove it as a 'community responsibility'. Further, we wish to cement our friendship by offering education and citizenship to the sons and daughters of prominent men within the tribe; by accepting applications for citizenship; and we want permission to build small fortified posts for half squadrons of cavalry for our mutual protection and to serve as recruiting stations. This is done at a time when military preparations are complete and the legion is within striking distance.

"We achieve two things by these actions. Gratitude - which is an ephemeral emotion I grant you, and a recognition that Camelod has the strength to proceed without their permission, but has chosen not to do so. The results of our action against their neighbours should make a powerful example of what we can do - if we want to." Gregory sat down again and waited for a response.

Apart from Myrcal and Lucius, the faces around the table registered varying degrees of shocked surprise. The idea that the ruler of Camelod - who was apparently a generous and considerate man - should put forward the idea of fomenting war amongst the tribes so that the legion could come forward as saviours - and that this would promote an increasing growth in the lands ruled by Camelod, was disturbing. Lucius had seen the brutality that Gregory was quite prepared to practice if he thought the measures justified. It made him a little nervous of his friend sometimes, as if the brutality might behave like lightning and

discharge itself in all directions. Myrcal sat quietly, confident that she knew what was in her husband's mind - confident too that he was the last person alive to act without thought. It used to disturb her a little to suddenly realise that even at the most emotional of moments he had total control of himself and was even calculating responses. It showed in his eyes - even if he **was** smiling.

Brioc was the first to put his thoughts into words, "Lord. You surely cannot mean that we should encourage one tribe to attack another - to raid and plunder, rape and burn - as we wait for a suitable time to intervene and simply so that we may act as ...asdeliverers!"

"Do you see something wrong with that Brioc?"

"Wrong Lord? Wrong?" The druid was now enraged, "Do I see something wrong in allowing innocents to be slaughtered so that we can expand our ...our influence? Yes! And Yes! again. I will not countenance it. Never!" And he crossed his arms, sat back and glowered defiantly at his ruler - who said, "Thank you Brioc."

"Who's next?"

Septimus merely gave him a sardonic smile, the middle aged primus had connived at more devious and callous schemes than this during his career. Caionac and Dungan bore horrified expressions, but sat stolidly determined, for the present, to observe the strict letter of their legion oaths. Daffyd, after first reacting as Brioc had done, was now leaning back in his chair and eyeing Gregory with a speculative stare. The other two councillors, angrily echoed Brioc's view. Gregory waited them out and then, standing up, walked over to the window and gazed out at the central garden.

"You'll be relieved to learn that I have no present intention of fomenting war between the tribes for our gain. However you must also realise that it **was** an option. What you must accept is that we cannot wait for another fortunate event similar to the Brigante descent on the Cornovii. We have to make things happen for ourselves. That means that we will invade selected areas, as if we were Romans or Catuvellauni or Brigante. No bystanders will be deliberately embroiled and I believe that almost every time we will be relieving pressure on the tribes from Brigante ambitions. That is not simple generosity or philanthropy, in our own interests we must do all that we can to gain citizens from the gratitude of tribes that we assist."

Gregory settled in his chair again as they digested this change in the vague policy that they had followed until now, "You should know that our recent growth and the increase in

our exports - particularly the items that cannot be reproduced anywhere in the Roman Empire has excited the greed and aquisitioness of Roman and Gallic magnates. It is certain that they will try to persuade the emperor to reverse the Augustan policy of 'no further expansion' and invade these islands. Matters of this nature do not get attended to overnight in Rome, but you can be assured that sooner or later they will land in the south-east - you will remember that we had a conversation similar to this a year or two back and that was why we built Cantodunon. It was further from the nearest point to Gaul and it seemed very likely that we would be able to convince Rome that the rich lands of the south-east could be held easily, but going beyond the line of the Trent would not be easy and probably not worth the trouble.

"This land is no longer such an insignificant prize, we have iron, lead, silver, building stone, a widespread agriculture and much, much more. To put it succinctly, we are extremely wealthy. Our only real protection will be to become even wealthier and very much stronger. We can become stronger only if we combine conquest with making more friends and citizens. The towns we build (and the smaller settlements), will follow the same pattern as now; their citizens will have the same degree of sophistication provided here. The lands of their enemies - and in this part of Britain that largely means one of the Brigante tribes - will be their's/our's because they will be Camelodians, owing loyalty to Camelod as a matter of choice. Their oath will be to Camelod and Lugh as supreme God, individuals and groupings will worship their personal Gods as before, but Lugh rules all - just as Jove rules all in Rome."

He addressed himself to Brioc for a moment, "You and I discussed some of this the other day. We both know that Rome hates the druidic religion and a substantial element in any decision that the Emperor makes towards invading this country will be coloured by that hatred. The druids are seen as the instigators of rebellion amongst the tribes of Gaul. Rome would dearly like to eradicate them., but for Britain as a whole I see the druidic religion and the druidic college as a unifying force. At the moment your college meets in various holy sites around the country, none of them comfortable, all of them transitory. If there was a permanent complex of shrines and teaching facilities, the college would find itself better placed to control the worship of Gods, the observance of ancient laws and the recording of history."

Brioc may have been consulted before, as Gregory had stated, but it was quite clear from his expression that he had very little idea where the present argument was leading. When that became clear with Gregory's next sentence he was stunned.

"I propose a small town with the druidic college at its physical and moral centre. The college would have a permanent location for its celebrations, the discussions of law and the preservation of oral history. I believe that the importance of the druidic religion to the state of Camelod would be increased by making its presence physical, erecting hostels for the druids and bardoi, houses for whoever the college decides should permanently staff the town, such as teachers of music, medicine, keepers of records. It would form a centre for our culture as well as our religion - I think that it would strengthen Camelod, which increasingly is composed of men and women from many different tribes. Self interest is a major driving force in creating a new, loyal citizen, but another which is at least as important is the creation of community and a common religion. Brioc knows that I have studied the druidic colleges laws and the mores that its' members try to inculcate into the common people of this land, these studies have been made through the few written accounts that exist and by listening to the bardoi. The old, dark Goidel druidic practices have been almost eradicated by our own Brython druids. The days of human sacrifice are gone, in the main. There might be backsliding in the odd corner of the forests, but, apart from the victims, it is of little importance. However, there are turbulent times ahead and who knows what might be brought up out of the dark places should Rome invade and other Britons fall back on old religion.

"Creating a permanent Holy of Holies, as a place of learning, religious observance and pilgrimage would be a strong bulwark against that danger. It remains only for Medoc, Brioc and the other leaders of the college to approve the idea and choose a site, and we can commence building it. The first building will be of wood because of necessity - our masons have enough to do as it is -, but I think that a place of trees and timber temples is appropriate for our religion."

There was a total silence after he had finished talking about the new druidic college and he sipped at his cup before continuing, "There is one last matter, and it brings us back to military business. Myrcal's people, the Parisi are spread along the River Ouse and its tributaries - and there are many of them. Beturos, as you must know, for Kierha, " He nodded towards the Amazonian councillor, "lives there - is their chief town and port. Although our own exports have greatly swelled the business of its merchants and shipmen, the trade along the waterways is still important to them, and the Brigante tribes of the north are now pirating their boats. They have also over-run two of the small settlement ports (the major source of pottery for this part of Britain) about fifty miles from Beturos. Here is an example of a military intervention - and invasion - which would certainly be welcomed by our friends on the Abos and which gives us the opportunity to colonise the land to the north of us. The Parisi in general see no reason why we should not build settlements, watermills, military posts - and accept citizens and recruits from the

fairly scattered, but quite militant - settlements that exist now. There seems to be a move by the Beturons themselves to seek citizenship." Kierha frowned, "I didn't think that you were aware of that Kierha, but the possibility is there and I think that rich though the town is, becoming a part of Camelod would be of advantage to them. There have been raids by pirates in the past and I think that Rome will encourage more - they know our connections with the Parisi are close. A legionary fortress for four centuries, and some well placed ballista would make them much more secure, but for now Beturos is solely a Parisi town.

"However, we do have an excellent opportunity for legitimate (in Parisi eyes, at least) conquest, booty and new settlements; right now." Gregory looked around the table, Brioc was clearly thinking of something else, the two primus looked slightly stunned at the recent conflict of emotions, but happy at the prospect of action, Septimus was making notes on a wax tablet and the three councillors seemed satisfied with the immediate future. It was time to bring the meeting to a close.

"There are preparations to make for the expedition - it won't be a hasty affair as others (particularly the last), have been. Right now the great map in the war room shows Camelod to be shaped like a club - a long shaft based on the run of the Trent swelling out into the new territories and embracing the Severn. If all goes well, there will be new territories to the north too, swelling around the Rivers Ouse, Derwent, Foulness, Aire and Wharfe. The Parisi tell me that this is a land of woods, meadows and swamp. It's good cattle country, good agricultural land, not too hilly, but with ranges of hills on the west and east. In particular the rivers flow together in the Ouze and make a network of waterways that debouch into the Abos. We will have water transport the full length of Camelod and easy access to Gaul and Lower Germania. The Parisi have not spread into it, they have only been in Britain for four or five generations and the Brigante were always an obstacle. Now, of course they are more than an obstacle, they are a threat to the Parisi and I see no difficulty in invading their land, developing new settlements, accepting Parisi as citizens and legionaries and, as I said at the beginning, making Camelod richer and more powerful.

"I have to ask - you are my councillors after all - do any of you see any difficulty in that or any reason why we should not take advantage of events that we have **not** engineered?" There were no objections, Brioc was still building the new college town, the two young primus could not have been persuaded now by any consideration to give up the approaching expedition, Septimus was fully expecting to be involved heavily in his first martial endeavour for five years and the councillors had their concerns too - and unspoilt by any thoughts of the morality of it all.

"Then I will meet with you Brioc after you have consulted with Medoc." An ironic smile was directed at the druid, "You are going to consult with the Archdruid now, aren't you? Hmm.....I have to say my friend that I am wondering just how you are going to do that? Medoc was in his

round house just two days ago - d'you expect me to believe that he is already on his way? It's a good two day's journey for an old man in a litter." His laughter was almost boyish, he'd had enough of playing the patriarch for that day, "We will meet tomorrow afternoon, good day to you."

"Gregory." It was Lucius, "Why do you play these games?"

"Game? Do you think that I would shrink from doing exactly as I said. Causing one tribe to prey on another for our advantage. Allow women and children to be killed, raped, enslaved so that we will appear as liberators to one or other of the combatants? Surely not. We sell slaves now."

"Only men - and only then after defeating them in battle." There was affront in Lucius's voice whether because of the cold blooded suggestion, or because he recognised that Gregory had been playing his games again. "You had no intention of such a thing, so why bruit it?"

"Did I not? Lucius old friend and brother after all these years you still do not know me."

"I know you better than to believe that you would behave in that fashion."

"I think you ought to revise your opinion of me, but noI had no intention of such a thing., but only because there was no need. And I don't think there ever will be, this country has a superfluity of bellicosity (Doesn't that have a ring to it?). Plenty of bellicosity, I cannot envisage the rather childish plot I outlined - and didn't it occur to you that we would of necessity have to hang around the outskirts as it were of the conflagration we had encouraged. It would surely be enough to put a stop to their mutual hostilities and look at us suspiciously?

"Of course. The extreme suggestion I made was enough to horrify our highly moral Druid - and worry our two young primus - Gods, I wish they were ten years older - the reality I revealed afterwards was made more palatable by the bitterness experienced before. They would have gone along with our present intentions, but not too happily. Nobody is a threat to us at the moment - there is not that excuse for mayhem. We simply want to conquer more land, increase our legion and citizenry. But by the time I had outlined my true

intentions, Brioc was happily surveying his druidic college town - secure in the thought that it was not a bribe for him to complaisantly stand by whilst I murdered women and children. Daffyd had already guessed at the ploy, the primus were happily constructing battle plans and Kierha and Huw were distracted by matters of trade and the expansion of the guilds' memberships that must result from an increase in citizens, land and strength. It was a simple matter, but well worthwhile."

He draped one arm over Myrcal's shoulders and grinned at Lucius, "I think it ought to be a water borne operation - I have some ideas for armoured boats so that the legion need not wear personal armour when there is a chance of having to swim. If you go over to his workshop, you'll find that Dewar has some sketches from me. If he hasn't already got that bright Coritanni lad to introduce some useful modifications to the decrees of his Lord, I'll be much surprised - and disappointed."

Husband and wife, virtual king and queen of Camelod, watched Lucius stride off in the direction of the praesidium, which fronted their personal quarters.

"Do you think that Medoc will be here tomorrow, Gregory?"

He sighed in exasperation, "I think it is very likely Love."

"But how does he do it?"

"I'm bug.... I really don't know. I really don't."

"Never mind Dear. I like that old man, he always seems to be smiling at some secret thought when he sees me and the children, but he's a delightful man. I wonder what it is that so amuses him?"

Gregory knew, or at least he guessed. It had been five years since his temporary leman had discreetly disappeared when he brought Myrcal back from Beturios, but he would rather that Myrcal did not learn of it.

The house, or at least this part of it, was empty of servants and others, the children were with their tutors. He bent his head and murmured in Myrcal's ear, brushing the fine blonde hair to one side, "Let's go to our room for an hour or two, Love. I'm going to be very busy for the next week or so, and celibacy is a terrible burden."

She widened her eyes in mock surprise, "How would you know that then?"

October AD41

Clarbre

The site for the Druidic college had been chosen and was in the early stages of construction. It was to stand on a small wooded hill (which, nevertheless, was the most prominent feature for miles in that flat land) above the river Idle. Clarbre, the shining hill, was unique. The Druidic college at this time was no more than a convention, a group of acclaimed scholars, teachers and seers who came together upon occasion. There was no formal structure to their composition. They came together by consent at festivals or when there was some matter of great import, the size of the meeting was not stipulated nor its members. If a druid was recognised by his peers as a man (or, occasionally, woman), worthy to be heard at the meeting then they were a part of that college. Decisions that needed to be made on matters of moment, were made after a meeting place had been arranged - there was no required quorum. The decision to take this present momentous step had been made by a meeting between Medoc, Brioc and five other druids at the nemeton in Ratas. Word had been spread, in the way that Druidic communications commonly 'happened', and a general, rather amorphous picture of the feeling of the brotherhood conveyed to the meeting.

Clarbre was accepted as the name of this new centre for druidism, and the implied and startling decision that there would be permanent residence for druids and the college, with the necessity of organising the faculty members, was taken after a 'conference' of only ten days. That meeting itself, was a substantial break with tradition and yet, Medoc averred, this change was within the original vision of the old prophecy concerning Camelod. The prophecy was wellknown, but its detail was not and a young bardoi from Medoc's home undertook the task of reciting it. It had come from the earlier Gedoic people and required repeated performances in the old language and in translation to old Brythonic to establish its veracity. Reference had to be made to a long history of reputable bardoi to confirm the oral transmission over the centuries; that reference itself was a task for bardoi and agreement by the college that their reputations had ensured accurate, word for word transmission. The time was wholly taken up with this process and the parallel one of reciting relevant histories of bardoi who had taken the prophecy into their repertoire, but at the end it was enthusiastically accepted by the meeting, now grown to twelve as druids had appeared in Ratas and joined the college. It was not only the physical manifestation of the college as a permanent site with buildings that was accepted, but, just as importantly, the idea that there would be druids, bardois and seers living there, and that the teaching of

the histories, laws and magical lore would take place at Clarbre rather than in the personal homes of druids.

Construction had begun twenty days ago, the legions engineers and road builders working under the instruction of three druids, of whom Brioc was one. The intention was first to reduce the wood that clad the small hill chosen for Clarbre, to a circle four hundred paces across. It was the least troublesome of the tasks of preparing the building site, the legion simply followed the boundary marked by the supervising druids, but when the wood had been shaped to their satisfaction it had to be blessed - and from then on, any tree removed required individual prayers before it was taken out of the wood and taken to the river Idle where it floated to the confluence with the Trent and then made its voyage to a sawmill five miles downstream.

The rite was not longwinded, but it needed to be repeated many times, for the wood was to be reduced to a ring surrounding the pallisaded buildings. A broad processional roadway was marked across the circle, running from east to west and the centre of the wood was hollowed out to produce a round space three hundred paces wide. Although it was not densely wooded there was a total of some two thousand trees ranging in size from saplings to mature trees forty feet tall to deal with - it was a very extended business.

In December the land was cleared to form the shaped woods and a tall fence with two gatehouses had been put in place. At the very centre of the cleared space a single debarked and polished pole was erected and stood fifty feet tall denoting the completion of the basic Nematon and with a final celebration the college was declared to have been founded and the ground made holy. The engineers breathed sighs of relief, they had suffered a stoppage of work two thousand times, standing silent while a druid apologised to a tree, and sang praises to its quality before signaling the woodsmen to cut it down and the legionaries to grub out the root. From now on it would be a relatively simple matter of constructing the individual buildings and consecrating each one as it became ready for occupation, but Clarbre had already come into existence and Medoc claimed his place there immediately, having a temporary round house built to accommodate him and his immediate family. The sites for six building were set out within the wall at intervals of sixty degrees about the centre, and a circle marked around the nematon pole a hundred paces wide - it prescribed an area capable of containing fifteen thousand people standing quietly. Lucius wondered whether a large group of Celts could **ever** stand quietly - but he did not voice the thought.

The valley of the Cothi was bustling with activity. Venutius's growing wealth and personal charisma had drawn warriors from all over the southern Brigante country and the Dobunni,

until the collection of houses and barracks strung up and down the valley on either side of the mine workings, housed five thousand men. The slaves who worked the mines that they once owned, were confined within a strong fence guarded by men with twelve huge war dogs, fearsome beasts that stood waist high to a grown man, with square jaws that could break a thigh bone in two at first bite. Only the handlers dared to approach them and for the safety of the other inhabitants of the valley there was a second wall around the slave encampment to prevent the dogs straying.

The mines themselves were no longer simple pits scratched in the ground, Venutius was more ambitious than the Scanti had ever been and had forced the driving of shafts into the hillside. His reward was a tenfold increase in gold production, so that he now had sufficient to buy another five thousand warriors if he needed them. At the moment he found it difficult enough to mount raids to provide all the food and fodder that his army needed. The grazing for the horses had long gone and they depended on buying oats and hay - buying as a last resort, most feed for the horses was gained by warfare. Likewise the game in the area had been exterminated and food was brought in for his men by scavenging and raiding parties - it was becoming a little more difficult week by week, but he was loth to move his army out of the valley, because that meant that he would have to abandon the gold mines.

The Gods had certainly been working hard on Venutius's behalf recently - just a few days ago a delegation from Rome had arrived with chests of silver coins worth ten talents (a quarter of a million sesterces), to renew the prince's status as a 'Friend of Rome'. It had been five years since the last favourable contact and he quite thought that his friends in Rome had forgotten him., but no! And with the chests had come even more welcome news. King Berica of the Atrebatas had fled to Rome when the Catuvellauni annexed his kingdom. It was not this misfortune to a fellow ruler that pleased Venutius, but the information that he was petitioning the Senate to ratify the agreement it had made many years ago to protect the client kingdoms in Britain. Apparently he was receiving a warm welcome - a very different reception to what he could have expected five years ago. The pressure for an invasion was building and when it came Rome's legions would take all the rich lands of the south east - most likely as far as the Trent - and wipe away the canker of Windubro and Cantodunon. Then he, Venutius, would take the rest of Camelod! He could get along with the Romans, although he doubted that his consort Cartimandua would - a bitter woman and old! Almost fifty years now and with a disgraceful eye for young lovers. With the invasion it would not only be Camelod that would make recompense to him for their insults, but that vinegary creature too. Although, he admitted with a sniff, she had once made an athletic and highly satisfactory bedmate. Maybe he would keep her as a

concubine, a contrast to some of the sweeter and more compliant women who would wait on his wishes. Maybe, maybe. Venutius nodded happily at the daydream.

However, in the meantime he had a senator, Honorius Junius Galbo to entertain, with his staff of two knights and squad of Roman legionaries. (A tough looking squad they were too - and seemingly extremely efficient, he would welcome a thousand or two of men like those to incorporate into his own army. Camelod would melt away under his attack then, like mice before his old grey household cat. He chuckled, enjoying the simile -, but not right now. Things were going very nicely, his personal fortune was multiplying and when the invasion came Why, he might be able to borrow a Roman cohort or two! He could certainly expect to be able to hire one. Dreaming done with, Venutius strode off to his home. That was something he had learned from the Camelodians. His home was built of timber boards on a dressed stone base, with a roof clad with the blue stone of this western land, that split so readily into thin sheets. Even the round steam house was built of stone, a great improvement on the old one in the land he thought of as home. The walls did not soak up the steam as soon as water was thrown on the hot stones, neither did they become soggy and unpleasant to lean against. Rounding the hillside he smiled with pleasure to see that his guests were at that moment being welcomed into the house.

He remembered their expressions when they first arrived. Their long and dangerous voyage to the west coast had been made in a ligurian, a fast naval galley that was excellent in the Middle Sea - he had travelled in one himself when he visited Rome as a youth -, but dangerously flimsy for the Ocean. He did not envy them the journey back. And the tale they had recounted of their travels since landing and discovering that the Friend of Rome, Prince Venutius was absent upon an expedition of conquest. Seemingly they had not learned of the debacle at Windubro. This large house, built of wood for necessity, but after the pattern of a Roman Townhouse, must have been an astounding sight for them after the countless mud and wattle huts that they had lived in for two months as they traipsed after the prince.

All good, all worthwhile. The house, the ostentatious wealth within it (in gold embellishment, not Gaulish furniture - importation here was almost impossible for Venutius), all reinforced their view of a strong ally within Britain. How long to the invasion he had asked, only receiving evasive if confident replies. It would be soonperhaps a year or two. There was much to organise, an army of five or six legions probably - and their auxiliaries - Venutius caught himself about to gape at the numbers of armed men indicated. Battle hardened, disciplined troops at that! It boded well for the British 'Friends' and ill for the Catuvellauni, in particular, for Camelod. He had opened two flagons of the increasingly rare wines from Gaul. There had been ten when he had attacked Windubro,

treated with great tenderness and travelling slowly in a thick bed of straw well to the rear of his army. Now there were only three - no, **one** ... now that he had broken into the flagons to greet the delegation. Never mind, he would live an acetic life until Camelod was conquered and then he could have good wine again. Not just the Gaulish, but the fabled Falernian of eleven years ago - Venutius prided himself on his intelligence of the continent. Pausing for a moment on the broad limestone step he looked around, the main workings of the gold mine were right under his eye, half a mile further down the valley where he could judge the day's output without the tedious business of approaching its' squallor and odors. It was a busy scene, even viewed at a half mile distance - and highly satisfactory. He entered the hallway as the guard opened one of the great doors, nodding a brief salute to the looming, armoured figure. Highly satisfactory.

Chapter ten

November AD 41 Cantodunon.

The expedition was ready. Eight barges, each capable of carrying a century of heavy infantry with six thousand pounds of additional equipment and stores, were waiting for the men lined up at the docks. The vessels were simple, box-like boats, forty feet long with a beam of eight feet and a draught of just over two feet. Eight two-man oars on each side propelled them and no provision had been made for stepping masts - the sheer weight of the masts and rigging would have increased the draught by a foot and these boats were essentially river boats designed to ride through shallows and discharge their occupants rapidly. Two feet of water would not slow down the infantry by much even when landing against opposition. This was the river expedition.

Twenty centuries had been committed to the expedition as a whole, the remaining twelve being cavalry and mobile ballista batteries - which had been despatched by ships to the opposite bank of the Abos where the Parisi had assembled an army to act as auxiliaries to the legion. Myrcal's two ships, *Fortunate Voyager*, the wedding gift from her father and *Beturos' Revenge* which had been captured when pirates assaulted Beturos, carried horses and most of the forty eight mobile ballista. Three other pot bellied vessels were needed for the rest of the horses - there were eight hundred and fifty of them - and the frequent journeys to ferry them all across the treacherous currents of the Abos were a trial to men and beasts. Night fell before more than half of the task was completed and untidy camps were set up on the banks, secure in the knowledge that there was no possibility of any enemy within twenty miles. The work began again at sunrise without any wait for a meal, breakfast was eaten during the crossing - or at least some soldiers ate during the crossing, others were too busy keeping the horses calm.

Camelod had possessed an army for eight years now, although for the first three years it would have been better decribed as a disciplined armed band and composed of very young men - few over the age of twenty. Since then, however the army had grown in numbers and experience and the youths had become men. New recruits kept the average age low, but the centuries that had been chosen for the expeditions had been fighting small engagements, when necessary, with the surrounding tribes for three years now. Lucius's exercises were often more strenuous (and produced more casualties), than the skirmishing and they took place in all weathers. In fact since the winter weather discouraged raiders from the Brigante, Coritani, and Cornovi, there were more exercises at that time - usually in the high bleak hills to the northwest of Windubro. Fully half of Camelod's army was composed of men who could carry their campaign gear thirty miles a day through wind, rain, snow and ice, set up a camp and then fight mock battles with heavy wooden swords and ball-ended pilum. Their place in the battle line was a matter of

instinct - they could find it in the dark and the confusion of a night 'attack' on their marching camp. Their shield mates on the left in the line were constant companions when away from the domestic comforts of the garrison towns and after three years no man had to worry about his comrade's support.

The boats set off with the last of the ebb tide. The trick was to reach the Abos just before the turn and be clear of the mouths of either the Trent or the Ouse before the tidal bore raced upriver. The incoming tide would be sufficient to take them up to the Ouse an hour or so after the bore - and after any floating debris had settled down into a predictable course along the river. The Parisi in charge of each boat were experienced rivermen and all were more than four miles up river when the tide turned again. A light, but cold rain soaked their backs and Dungan as primus called for camp to be made as the light faded an hour prior to sunset and turned the river into an even more dangerous place. One after the other the boats made for the bank, beaching upstream of bow lines made fast to a series of pegs, six to the line - they were expected to resist the turbulence of the bore that was due in another six hours. Weather shields and tents were erected in expectation of snow and the expedition settled down to light fires and cook their first hot meal of the day. Morning would bring coordinating orders from Lucius - their content would depend on how well the transportation had gone at the Abos crossing, and the weather.

At the Abos crossing the last horse landed at the sandy banks exposed by low tide, just as the tide turned and Lucius heaved a great sigh of relief. Camps and paddocks, food and fodder, tents and fuel had been organised during the wait for the second half of the cavalry and ballista batteries and within an hour the men were able to rest and eat. Lucius declared the next day 'make and mend' - equipment had suffered during the short voyage, despatched two messengers off to the Ouse and then took himself off to Beturos to confer with the Parisi chieftains.

Six chieftains, four of them warriors and two ship owners and captains, met him outside the boundary ditch of Beturos. It was beginning to rain, and Lucius had been in Britain long enough to recognise the sudden lowering of temperature as an early dusk crept in from the sea. In an hour or two the rain would turn to sleet - and then, most probably snow.

"Kierha!" He might have guessed that that formidable woman would have elbowed her way into the leadership of the Parisi force. "But why not?" He murmured to himself, he knew from seeing her fight here by the dockyard when the pirates struck, that she was the equal of most men in simple muscularity and she must have had plenty of experience at sea in fighting off marauders.

To his physical dismay she embraced him vigorously, Lucius had not donned armour for this meeting -, but she had. "Lucius m'lad, you're getting soft! That wife of yours is too gentle by half - too much bed I reckon."

He had not blushed for decades, but he did now as the other chieftains roared at his discomfiture. She grinned at him, and thumped his arm affectionately, "Don't worry lad, I'm old enough to be your mother, your virtue is safe with me." To Lucius's intense chagrin he blushed yet again, but, with an effort, was still able to reposite, "I'm not betting on it Kierha..... Has anybody a house with a lock on the door?"

A heavy hand was rested on his shoulder and he turned to look a beaming face with an enormous red moustache, "Ah my friend, you had not appreciated who is our host this night?"

"Driscoll! D'you mean to say ...?"

"Oh yes., but don't worry my lad, I've never known her to take a man against his will." And the generous mouth opened wide to gust an enormous burst of laughter. "Come along, then. We can't stand here all night, the hall's awaiting. Food, wine and songs to launch our joint adventure. What?"

A little bemused, Lucius followed the Parisi through a double doorway and into a well lit, stone built room with a wide fireplace set in the middle. A large aperture in the roof boards directly overhead, had its own separate roof a foot or so above it to prevent the weather invading the room. The freshening wind whipped the smoke away and the flames roared hungrily at the great logs that had been laid like a funeral pyre in a rectangular pattern with the wood lying criss-cross. It was quite unlike any of the native Celtic houses that Lucius had seen, but then, he realised, the Parisi had come to Britain from a civilised part of Gaul only a few decades ago. At the end of the hall a dais was raised (presumably for formal meals), but this was unoccupied at the moment and enough armed chairs were set out around short tables to accommodate the twelve men and women. Lucius wondered if this arrangement was in imitation of Gregory's preferred manner of entertaining, since there were more chairs than occupants, it made for a mobile feast as the participants wandered from table to table. Large plates of roast joints and birds, sat next to more ambitious culinary item, bowls of sliced meats cooked in wine with various vegetable, shaped pies, plaited loaves of white bread and large flat loaves of larded bread. Salmon and trout, turbot and, on a table of its own a fish that Lucius did not recognise, but which Driscoll identified as sturgeon. It must have been six feet long, but his companion insisted that it

was a small, juvenile specimen. It was skinned, and the flesh cut to insert slices of tart green apples and braeberries. Bowls of fruit of course, and honey cakes soaked in the strong mead, almond cakes that must have been imported, sweet custards and savoury custards, strings of dried fruits wrapped around peeled sticks for convenience.

None of the dishes was huge, but dispersed to encourage a wide sampling. No wine was served with the meal, just a light ale, crisp and innocuous.

After the meal however, the tables were withdrawn and the chairs drawn closer together in a half circle. The wine was the same mead that the cakes had been soaked in, not terribly sweet, but darkened with malt and extremely powerful. Lucius looked for water to add, but found none within reach and realised that the Parisi were all happily downing the liquor unwatered. He followed suit, but carefully and with the hope that he could last out the evening - it had been ten years at least since he had slipped beneath a table, and he had no intention of diminishing his office as commander of the whole invasion by collapsing in a drunken stupor.

Conversation was brisk throughout the meal, particularly around Lucius and Driscoll, his own grasp of the British language had never gained Gregory's fluency, but most of the Parisi spoke Latin as well as Gaulish and British. There were no difficulties in communication. One thing surprised him though. In Windubro and Cantodunon both he and Gregory were invariably addressed as 'Lord', but here, although they were perfectly respectful, the Parisi had a much less formal greeting which from his experience tonight seemed to be, "Lad", "Boyo" or "Brodre" - the last he took to be 'brother' - he hoped it was brother.

The fire roared away as it was kept fed with logs an arm span long; large flakes of snow blew in on one side of the vent, disappearing in seconds in the heat and the smoke shredded and whisked out at the other. Lucius observed that it looked to be snowing heavily outside.

"Ay, very like," his present companion stated, "but pay it no mind. It's getting colder now and the wind's moving it. By morning the ground will be hard and snow drifts are no problem. Lucius thought of his troops bivouacked in their leather tents. The snow might keep the tents warm, but the leather would be the devil to fold and pack on mules when it came time to move on, the day after the morrow. He was beginning to wonder whether a make do and mend period was a good idea. There would be small comfort in camp and he was not at all sure that the men would not be more comfortable marching - it depended on

what the weather was actually doing in the morning. A hard frost and snow drifts could be coped with, but high winds and deep cold would be another matter.

Slowly the group gathered about his table, changed until only the commanders of the Parisi contingent were present and the conversation turned to the operation - and the weather.

"Have we a weather prophet?" Lucius asked, looking around the group of four - who included Kierha (of course).

Driscoll nodded towards a short, sinewy man with an over-large cloak. Lucius could not imagine how he could bear to wear the thing, he was sweating mightily himself - and dressed only in tunic and breeks. "Let's ask Gwillam then."

"Hmm?" The small man looked up at them. "Weather?" He leaned back in his chair and stared at the roof. "I took a look out there an hour ago. Doesn't smell like wind, leastwise not from the east." The sea, of course lay to the east, and a wind from that direction, particularly with a bit of northing in it could chill a man to the marrow in very short time.

"I reckon it'll be quiet by midday." The wizened features screwed up into a sort of smile, "Yes, this is just a foretaste of winter. It won't get really vicious for two or three weeks yet."

"Good." This is what Lucius had been hoping for, and what the whole enterprise had relied upon. Hard, firm ground and no rain. Snow, fine snow that drifted, could be managed, but water resulting from melting heavy snow would be disastrous for the waterborne operation. The intentions of the expedition were firstly to recover the river ports that the Parisi had lost on the Ouse - that was the prime responsibility of the waterborne force of infantry and two batteries of mobile ballista. After that the boats would continue north along the Ouse to its' junction with the river Wharfe, establishing signal posts and three or four fortlets at century strength to control the rivers. One would be placed at the junction of the two, one about twenty mile up the Wharfe, another the same distance along the Ouse and probably, depending upon the resistance encountered, the last one as a staging camp within scouting distance of Ebor (a settlement of mixed antecedents - Brigante and Carveti). Whether the water borne expedition would travel further along the Ouse was again, a matter of the resistance offered.

The land based force, consisting of cavalry and the larger part of the mobile ballistas, was to drive north on the old trackway from Beturos to the Derwent river and follow it to its mouth, establishing signal posts and three fortlets along the forty mile long route. This

was all unexplored country so far as the Parisi were concerned, although their ships had mapped high ground at the coast which appeared to form a border to the lowlands that their march would traverse. It was expected that there would be small settlements on the low and the high ground, but no large, militant populations. Lucius intended that his one thousand Camelodians and nearly eight hundred Parisi should set up fortified settlements in three areas. One about twenty along the route to the Derwent, one at the Derwent and another at an undetermined point to the east of the track in the highlands, within sight of the sea and with the probable objective of establishing a small port in the summertime.

Both expeditions would remain separated, at least until next June or July, making use of the time to pacify (a good Roman term, Lucius felt), the disorganised tribes of this lush country, and reinforce the garrisons of the half dozen, or so, fortlets. The trackway would be improved to facilitate wagon transport of prefabricated watermills, sawmills and other supplies, 'ambassadors' would tour the area embraced by the Ouse and the trackway to encourage co-option into this expansion of Camelod and then in July the loop thrown around the area would be closed by occupying Ebor and building a town the size of Windubro.

It was a grandiose scheme for a kingdom the size and age of Camelod to indulge in. Clearly it threw a great deal of strain on the growing legion, but, Lucius felt it would accelerate the experience of the troops. However, it was thought unlikely that they would meet any dangerously organised armies in this area, and that the eastern tribes of the Brigante federation would remain in their highland settlements when it was clear that Camelod and the Parisi were interested in the rivers and the low lying lands between. There had been a certain amount of doubt as to how the Parisi would view this cooperative venture, but as he spoke with them here in the convivial atmosphere of the feasting hall, Lucius became convinced that the advice they had received from the council (two of whom were Parisi) and Myrcal's forcefully presented opinion, was absolutely right. The Parisi of Beturos were mainly merchants and traders. Their interests were in trading, there was a certain amount of agricultural land around Beturos and small farms, but they were looked upon as being simple extensions to the town, providing necessities such as wool, meat and vegetables. The outflung ports along the Ouse had been a recent venture and their experience with the Brigante had made them feel it was a mistake. All the Beturons wanted was to have the trade of the river country tranship and pass through their port. The trade from and with Camelod was only open to those of the Parisi who had become citizens of Camelod, of course.

It was a complex situation Lucius acknowledged silently as he listened to the comments of Driscol, Kierha, Gwillam and the fourth man, Donald. He knew that those of the Parisi who

were not also citizens of Camelod, were beginning to resent the advantages that such as Kierha and Driscol enjoyed. It was foolish, the remedy was in their own hands, but Lucius knew that the Parisi without dual citizenship were torn two ways, they wanted to remain independent - and they yearned to handle some of the wealth they could see flowing out of Camelod, such illogical internal conflicts were rarely solved easily.

Driscol's booming voice brought him back to the moment and he shrugged off Beturos's problems, a really expensive pirate raid on the port would concentrate their minds wonderfully. "Lucius, you're dreaming. Donald here, has had word from a cousin earlier today."

"Oh! Oh, yes ...what does it concern?"

"Let him tell you himself." The big man made an impatient waving gesture to Donald, "Come on man, spit it out - you've chewed the goodness out of it by now. What was it that you wanted to tell Lord Lucius - before sharing with us, eh?"

He was a lean man with a lean weather beaten face and a lean crop of hair on his head - which had been compensated for by a profusion of facial hair - a bush which sat comfortably on his chest like a favourite cat.

"My cousin is a ship owner too, Lucius. He trades in the north with the tribes of the lower Rhine and his route to the Abos can bring him close to the east coast when the wind is from the east or north." Donald stretched his legs out in front and settled himself in his cushioned chair with the practised ease of a professional story teller. Lucius's heart quailed a little, he wanted the news - whatever it was -, but he also wanted to go to his bed, and it looked as though that prospect was some way off.

'From Hubba's point down to the Spindles he had a fair wind and then he crossed the channel to the British coast just above ..." And so the tale drifted on without sail power or steering oar apparently. Lucius nodded, but managed to remain awake until the nub of the information was revealed. "A new port with a short quay and three medium sized Gaulish vessels tied up to it."

"Where?" Lucius's tone was sharp and his drowsiness suddenly erased, "whereabouts on the coast?"

"Why, it is as I said, just after they left the great headland to the north of the bay outside the Abos, they saw this little town (Brido, I think - it lies at the end of the old trackway) and three ships ...and a quay."

Looking at his companions with some urgency, Lucius said, "Would it make a good port do you think? Do you know it?"

Kierha shook her head, "Na, na. It lies at the end of the old trackway as Donald says, but I've never understood why the old people wanted to go there. There's very little shelter, a small river - almost a stream - that only shallow draught vessels could haven in."

"It's curious though. I'd like to know what is going on there."

"Well, Lucius my boy," Kierha had returned to her accustomed breezy, bluff manner once more, "it'll have to wait. No-one can get there in the winter from the Derwent, the valley faces due east and as soon as the wind swings into that quarter they'll have snow a tall man could sink beneath. I'll take a look in the spring for you." She shrugged her shoulders and the armoured prow of her bust heaved alarmingly, "Happen it's just some small fleet taken shelter from the north wind - it'll serve for that readily enough."

So it was left, and the party turned in for the night, trooping through a door at the end of the hall to a dormitory up stairs and windows open to the heat of the hall. Kierha and a young man had taken another door and, presumably now lay in a more private bed. Lucius rolled up on his mattress, cloak and heavy blanket rolled tightly around him and was sound asleep before the rest had ceased their 'goodnights' and closing chatter.

Chapter Eleven

The expeditions along the Ouse and Derwent. November 41 AD

Lucius left Aiden, the primus pilus of the cavalry division, in charge of the Camelodian troops. The Parisi contingent was also horse borne, although Lucius would not have classified them as cavalry. Still they were enthusiastic and there was no question that they could fight. He had the agreement of Kierha, Driscol, Gwillam and Donald that they would fight in support of the cavalry and not go haring off on their own accord. As far as he could tell, this northwards march along the old trackway would not meet any tribes capable of giving any serious trouble until they reached the Derwent - and probably not even then. The river borne invasion was another matter, after they had passed the remaining Parisi river ports they would be coming to those that the Brigante had taken. Lucius felt that Dungan would need more support than Aiden - and he decided to join the river expedition with another century of cavalry - there was the bonus of being further away from Kierha. It was agreed that the cavalry and the Parisi would begin their march on the morrow. It was not a matter of coordinating a battle plan, but simply that the ground was hardening nicely and the powdery snow was blowing off the trackway and into the woods. Another twelve hours would make it easier for the Camelodians to carry out their major task of making the road passable for wagons and sweeping the countryside for a mile or two on either side for hostile 'natives'. It was a word that he would not use in public, but nevertheless that's how he thought of them.

A century of cavalry and eight mobile ballista accompanied him on the short journey to the river Ouse, not for his personal security, but because overnight he had come to the conclusion that the riverborne penetration ought to be accompanied by a land force capable of dealing with any attempt at ambushing the boats. The cavalry could only deal with attempted ambush on this, the left bank, but the ballista could make a real mess of warriors lying in wait on the further bank - without any need to cross. The boats were not hard to find, the increased flow of water down the Ouse, the tree trunks and debris, and the outgoing tide, had made it impossible to make any headway upstream and so they waited for the tide to turn and negate some part of the snow swollen flow. Lucius caught up with them just before noon - or what appeared to be noon, the sky was so heavy and dark that it was difficult to tell. Men had to rely on experience and (since it was the tide they were waiting for after all), the direction of the river flow.

"Ho! Dungan. Is this the only problem so far?"

The primus stood up from his squat on a stump, "Yes Lord. Just this little matter of not being able to fight our way upriver yet -, but it won't be long now." He had been watching

his men sling sticks and small pieces of wood into the river and judge their speed past the bank. Some of them were being caught in eddies as the flow of water riverdown met the tide coming in, long fingers of water moving in opposite directions, mingling like interlocked hands and pushing chaotically against each other.

"No! Just a few minutes now I reckon." He saluted his general, "If you'll forgive me Lord, it's time to get oars manned. With luck, we'll make ten miles before the tide ebbs. Then if the weather gets no worse - no more snow or rain at any rate - we'll make better progress tomorrow." Having given his orders he returned to where Lucius was now ordering the cavalry and ballistas and issuing instructions for surveying the evening camp. That was not difficult given Dungan's estimate of progress. A good flat piece of land was to be looked for, with a shallow bank and relatively clear of snow. Lucius calculated that the men would not have the energy to shift a great quantity of snow as well as make a marching camp for eight hundred. A more immediate task had already been tended to by the boat troops. There were now two signal posts in being, overlooking the river - the first one being the large model, capable of being read across the breadth of the Abos.

"Yes, Dungan?"

"All done Lord. The first boat can leave on your signal." Lucius obediently held up his hand and then felt a fool for having done so. "Right... Wellcarry on Dungan."

The boats set off with thirty two men at the oars, half a dozen more to cope with emergencies and one mobile ballista in each. There was no point in risking their axles on the rough ground until action was contemplated. The rest of the men formed up on the bank and, with the cavalrymen trailing the ballistas' horses, to the fore, the column of almost five hundred men divided into two with an equal number of mounted men in each to tow the larger pieces of fallen timber off the track. The second half cleared the debris that the first half had left from making their pathway parallel to the river, filling in deep hollows as they went. When that was done they marched through the first section to extend the cleared portion, whilst the first took their turn at making up the surface. The road was relatively straight and most parts showed it was used frequently, consequently the road making proceeded at a pace that more or less matched the boats following the twists and turns of the river.

They had been on the march for a couple of hours and covered more than half the distance to the camp ground that had been reported as surveyed and being made ready, when a scout reproted to Lucius.

"Lord. There is a settlement on the river bank three or four miles beyond the camp."

"Did you see it yourself? Is it a river port - more important, is it still Parisi?"

The man was used to Lucius's headlong turn of speech when he wanted information and had not lost track of the order of the question. "Yes Lord, and it is a port, but whether they are Parisi or not I cannot tell. Optio Bodu is in charge of the surveyors and he told me to report to you first while he took a half century into the settlement."

"Bodu." He grimaced and then shook his head in mild irritation, "Yes, Bodu would think of going himself and leaving the survey in the charge of .." The question was unstated, but the scout could read eyebrows well enough. "Caducan, Lord."

"Hmph.... we can expect to hear something in the next hour I suppose." Lucius turned to look at the men who had gathered around to share the news, "Well? Have you heard enough? You've another three miles of road to make before we begin digging our camp ditches. How many of you want to be working in the dark, eh?"

There was a sudden (if spurious), surge of enthusiasm and the roadwork began again.

Another scout arrived less than half an hour later - a good sign, Lucius observed, if the port had been hostile they would have been one optio short and something of an hiatus before other men gathered the information needed.

"Parisi, Lord." The scout was a dour man, short on words, but polite, "the settlement is Parisi."

"Well now, that's good. We can sleep easily tonight. And how many of these Parisi are there?"

The scout cursed to himself - and cursed his optio - for some reason the matter of number had not been mentioned ...But surely it would have if Bodu had seen that the expedition was heavily outnumbered? "Fewer than three hundred, Lord." And he met Lucius's sceptical eye unflinchingly.

"Indeed ... And for a moment there I thought that you didn't know."

The work had slowed and there were at least twenty men innocently collecting debris and stones from the new road surface within ten yards of Lucius. "Let's get this over with shall

we? If we haven't got the ditches dug by nightfall, you'll all be standing watches two hours on and two off. And if no one, but me gets a hot meal I won't grieve over it. Move!"

The last mile was covered in remarkable time and the men got down to the task of digging the ditch. The boats grounded on a beach close by and sharpened stakes unloaded, to form the palisade, roughly bonded together with withies. As night fell with a slow change from dark and drear to full night dark, the fires were lighted, a barrier drawn across the entrance to the camp and the guards for the horse lines detailed. Despite Lucius's grumbles it was smartly done. A large tent served for the principia and Lucius's sleeping quarters - he gathered the senior officers together for a meal and the next day's orders. The two cavalry optios, Bodu and Caducan, three infantry and mobile ballista officers, and primus Dungan.

The meal was hard bread and roast mutton, eaten in civilised fashion off wooden platters. Light barley beer, drunk from wooden cups, moistened the bread and lifted the mutton fat from the throat. It was a meal they had all worked hard for and on the whole Lucius was pleased with the progress of the day.

"... but tomorrow centurion Tascat and I, with an escort of a century of cavalrymen, will make ourselves and our mission known to the Parisi at this settlement." Turning to the primus, "How many are there? Do you have a proper estimate now?"

"Why three hundred, Lord. As Cavan" (the second scout), "reported, Lord. A mixture of traders, rivermen and warriors."

"So the estimate did not include the female population?"

"Indeed not, Lord."

"Cavan made a lucky guess, Dungan. Make sure that another time he doesn't overlook the obvious even if his officer does."

"Yes, Lord."

"Not bad."

"Pardon, Lord?"

"This beer," Lucius proved the point with a long draught, "not bad at all. Not as useful as watered vinegar of course, but very drinkable."

Dungan looked puzzled, "Useful, Lord? How do you mean?"

"Vinegar and wine can be used to wash out a wound as well as quench a thirst, my lad. Now.... I want you to select a presentable century of cavalry and have them properly turned out, fed and polished, one hour after sun-up. Lance heads polished, swords loose and oiled in the scabbards, armour freshly sanded. We are paying an ambassadorial visit to the Parisi."

Addressing the rest of the small group he said, "Well, gentlemen, I am turning in half an hour from now, eat your fill and make sure your gone before I've finished shaving. Goodnight."

Lucius made a practice of shaving at night, when on the march. His skin was warm, there would be hot water waiting for him and he had a polished white bronze mirror in his kit.. He lifted a hand in salute as they stood to attention and strode through the unlaced doorway of his sleeping quarters to where his legionary servant had the shaving gear and warmed bedding ready for him. There were definite advantages he mused, to marching in Cohort strength with transport for commander's comforts - and spare hands to make his life more pleasant. Survey expeditions were all very well for the freedom they gave him, but they lacked these comforts.

The Parisi riverport was something of a surprise to Lucius. He had envisaged a collection of round huts, a ramshackle landing stage and some thatched warehousing for good in transit. He had not allowed for the effect that Camelodian cut boards had made on the neighbouring tribes.

The landing stage was properly piled and the piles protected from river debris with buffers of thick beech planks. A little double row of board-built houses with wood shingles angled up neatly from the stage and a few substantial warehouses, also built of board and shingles, flanked the settlement. Beyond the first houses that lined the roadway from the river, the settlement broadened out into a slightly disordered array of short lanes and houses. All neat; all wooden. There were about thirty of them and at the centre, opposite the end of the road to the landing stage was a clear space in front of a house twice as big as any other. This ordered, almost civic arrangement clearly belonged to the traders, warriors and farmers - much less impressive dwellings of mud, wattle and thatch straggled away, outside the neat township, across meadows and between cultivated fields - bare of

crops now, but ploughed. The elders of the small community received Lucius and his men in the space before the biggest house, with a score or so onlookers gathered in a bunch behind them.

Lucius halted the column and dismissed most of them in a pre-arranged move that reduced the natural intimidation that such a body of disciplined infantry and cavalry was bound to have - nevertheless they had made the point that Camelod had a powerful force in this area. Dungan, and four of the centurions were sufficient for dignity, the rest of them were erecting another signal post and establishing a marching camp.

Tascat acted as herald, striding out to stand halfway between the two parties. "This is the Lord Lucius, general of the army of Camelod. We are on the way to recover the ports that have been lost to the Brigante. Who is your chief man, please?"

A tall, imposing man with a rather haughty cast to his florid features, stepped forward, adjusting the folds of his chequered cloak to hang gracefully and display a tunic richly embroidered with silver thread, gathered in by a broad belt of red leather and cabuchons. "I speak for these people. Cumbol, of the Parisi. On their behalf I welcome you. News of your expedition had reached us from Beturos, but, I fear, too late."

There was no point in holding back Lucius felt, a decent introduction had been made and this talk of "too late" needed rapid explanation. "What do you mean, Cumbol? How is it 'too late'?"

"Lord, let us sit indoors, this cold weather may be all very well for a warrior such as yourself, but I am an old man, I would prefer to sit in the warmth while I tell you what has happened on the river and what is almost certainly about to happen."

Lucius smiled and accepted the invitation, "It is too damn cold for a warrior too." He muttered as he followed Cumbol's lead and entered the large house. A blazing fire greeted them - and a great deal of smoke; they did not have the same arrangement here that Kierha had in her hall. Benches and stools formed the major part of the seating - and two high chairs that the headman indicated were for his and Lucius's use. The usual Celtic compliments were ignored and he came directly to the nub of the present situation in this settlement.

"We are leaving, Lord, two hundred of our people have already gone by small pathways towards Beturos and the rest of us will be evacuating the port by boat and .." A smile fluttered briefly across his face, ".... and by the roadway that your army has made so

conveniently - it makes it easier for us to take most of our possessions. We thank you." It was a larger settlement than Lucius had expected, there must be more cleared land and grazing beyond the rough wooded ground.

"But why? ... The Brigante?"

"The Brigante." He gave a sombre nod. "The next settlement upriver, just fifteen miles away, was over-run two days ago. The few survivors who reached us estimated that there were a thousand warriors in the assault. The settlement was simply swamped.....and our spies tell us that more Brigante are arriving, mainly women and children - they aim to make it their own." Cumbol looked apologetic, but defiant too, defying any comment on their decision to leave.

"We cannot resist those numbers and, in any case, we are mostly traders and farmers - our warriors number fewer than a hundred now." The two hundred or so labourers and fieldhands were not included in Cumbol's measure of population - they were not slaves, quite -, but neither did they count as 'people'.

"I see." Lucius accepted a cup of hot mead and sniffed the heady fumes while he thought the situation through. He had no worries about the presence of Brigante warriors, the infantry, mobile ballistas and cavalry would make short work of them if they insisted on poking their noses out of the woods to the north. What engaged his mind immediately was the fact that the Parisi were preparing to give up title to this land, to surrender it. He continued to mull this over as he carried the conversation forward, "You are leaving the settlement ...and, I gather, would already have left were it not for our arrival today?"

"Sadly so, Lord."

"But we saw your village as we came in, Cumbol. Your fields are extensive and well tended - all ready for wintering. You have cattle under windbreaks and your houses are sturdy, well built - a great deal will be lost if you abandon it to the Brigante."

"But we save our lives and our children, Lord."

"Yes." Lucius looked around the hall without seeing any of it, his brain was not as apt to make sudden decisions (excepting military ones - and those had largely been inculcated by experience) as Gregory. "I need time to think matters over, but I believe we can help you."

"I don't doubt it Lord, but when your soldiers and horsemen are gone, what then? The Brigante come back."

One hand lifted in mild admonition, "Not necessarily, but let me think a while. Would you do me a favour and introduce my officers to your chief men and women?"

He was given a quizzical look, but Cumbol agreed and wandered over to join the group that had gathered around the fire.

Lucius's problem was that a process that he and Gregory had intended to take place over several months had been precipitated by the Brigante - and he was not sure at first sight, just how this affected matters. The Parisi in Beturos had already indicated that they were intent on concentrating on their sea trade and, apart from the necessities of farming and producing cloth for their own use, limit themselves to Beturos and its environs - becoming an enclave in Camelod, but independant. Gregory was sure that this situation would not last, there would be a steady 'bleeding' of the Beturon population to Camelod because of the personal advantages to be gained by living in Cantodunon or one of the settlements. Eventually, Gregory had predicted, the Beturons would have too few men and women to remain an independant town and would embrace citizenship in toto. Beturos would then become part of Camelod, acquire protection against sea raiders, develop some of the new industries and, having the right to trade Camelodian goods as citizens, increase their trading.

This settlement clearly was developed to produced food for Beturos - possibly exports - as well as handling the river trade. The numbers of peasants indicated that, if the mother town had come to rely on this agricultural production, the loss of the settlement would be sorely felt. Possibly the settlements that had been meant when the Beturons said that they had lost interest in them, were those further upstream.

Since these villagers were intending to leave the settlement now it would fall to Camelod by default - once the Brigantes were dealt with. Lucius could simply help the villagers to gather their property together and ship them to Beturos - which would cause some upset there, but would leave the riverport to the Camelodians to fortify, garrison and develop. On the other hand, if he were to offer to take all or most of the present occupants into citizenship, they would be able to fortify it and have a readymade garrison without reducing the strength of the expedition. The garrison would not be wholly Parisi of course, possibly a third and the rest of the able bodied men would accompany Lucius's troops on their way upriver. Training on the march would not be easy, but it could be done, and if the Brigante were obliging enough to attack them here, there was unlikely to be any effective

opposition to the river march until they got a great deal closer to the Brigante hills and strongholds. Neither approach would justify a complaint from the Beturons, but there was the population to take into account. The two or three hundred peasants would pose no problem - apart from the question as to their 'ownership'.

However the farmers, traders, boat owners and warriors were a different matter. They were men of account, they had property in this settlement. It might in effect be lost now to the Brigante, but if Camelod saved the village they would be very likely to take a different view and consider that appropriating the settlement was not simply a matter of taking from an enemy, but stealing from them! There was the question of oaths too. Citizens gave their oaths to Camelod under pain of severe penalties if they turned traitor. Probably these men were under oath to Beturons at the moment.

"Cumbol," He called across to the group and rose to meet the older man as he turned towards him, "Have you a bardoi in the settlement?"

"Of course, Lord Lucius. We are ... were five hundred. There is need for the law to be recited, genealogy and entertainment...."

"Good, then I think that if you agree, we will have a solution for your people that is a great deal better than leaving your homes and land for the Brigante." From the careful expression that Cumbol exhibited, he had been thinking too.

"Cumbol," Lucius said when they were seated side by side again - and with the others distant enough to offer a measure of privacy, "As you can see, we have a strong force here and one well capable of eliminating the present Brigante threat and, as you have already admitted there is nothing that your **own** people can do to withstand them." He watched the struggle in the man's expression, affronted pride on the one side, pragmatic acceptance of an obvious fact on the other.

"As you say Lord Lucius."

"Well I should tell you that, because of the Beturons' attitude towards the river settlements and ports, it was agreed between us that Camelod should take what it can from the Brigante and bring them and their people into our kingdom." He was glad that Gregory was not present, he hated referring to Camelod as a kingdom, even while he acknowledged that that was what it was in effect - and how the druids referred to it.

Lucius stretched his arms and gripped the decorative ends of the chair arms, "We are going to squeeze the Brigante on the river and extract everything of value they have or have taken, and make it ours - and, " a brief grimace of apology, "...that means this village as well and everything in it that you cannot take away."

The elderly headman sighed and shrugged, "What more could we expect? At least with your help we will be able to take more of our possessions to Beturos - and there will be no Brigante chasing us?"

The laughter that this brought made him start with surprise and Lucius said, "Indeed no. They will be far too busy to worry about you. There is something more Cumbol. I said that we would help you - and I meant something more than just helping you to flee with your goods."

Cumbol's eyes glinted in the firelight, suddenly alert to the approach of a bargaining, "What will you do when you appear in Beturos? Have you property there? Land? Have your men of worth got property in Beturos? I think that it is doubtful. So what will become of your men, the labourers, rowers and the others who depend on you for their living and hearthstone?"

"They will have their lives, Lord."

"And will the Beturons be happy to suddenly receive two hundred men and women with no work to do, little food, nowhere to sleep? Two hundred shiftless men and women in and around a town as small as Beturos will be considered a threat surely - or at the least, their presence will be uncomfortable. "

"We have four hundred people who work for us on the land and the river, not two hundred."

"Twice the problem then."

Shaking his head impatiently, Cumbol leaned back and looked Lucius straight in the face, "You have something you want to ask of us, Lord Lucius. Something you need and which we have the gifting of, yes?"

"Oh yes."

"Well then spit it out. Let me hear the worst of it. Are the Brigante a better proposition after all?"

Lucius felt a twinge of pity for the older man who, quite obviously was starting to see the ramifications of their evacuation. Until this moment he had been concerned only with saving what they could, the arrival of the legion's troops had increased that expectation and it was only now that he had looked beyond. Looked into the future and seen their arrival in Beturos as landless refugees, with some wealth, but not much and that soon expended, leaving them a responsibility for their families. Life would be lived on charity from now onif they were fortunate. Lucius forgave the show of temper and bitterness, he had the feeling that if he was put in the same position he would be breaking things right now.

"We want you, your men and women; warriors, farmers farmhands - all of you."

"To sell in Gaul? Oh yes, I've heard Cantodunon does a great trade with the slave markets there."

"Only our enemies, Cumbol. Only our enemies and you and your people are not that. No, what we want are citizens."

"Citizens?"

Lucius laughed, "Yes, Elder. Citizens." He paused to gather his thoughts, what he said now would be remembered and he did not want a hasty word or an impulsive promise used as a bludgeon against him.

"You know how we live at Cantodunon? Your peasants would either work for Camelod at the type of work they do now, or for you. Either way they would be paid."

The idea seemed to shock the headman more than anything Lucius had said so far, "Paid!"

"Indeed yes. In addition they would meet their obligations to Camelod. Every man between fourteen and forty years serves in the army, either as a legionary and training every day, or as a civilian training for a morning every fifteen days. Every year men and women plough, seed and harvest the communal fields if needed, or carry out other work like road building without pay - it's a form of taxation. They are also free to work on their own behalf and then they pay tax in coin or goods.

"You and the other freemen of this town, can either work for Camelod doing what you do now - overseeing the farming, shipping, trading - being paid according to rank - or work on your own behalfand pay taxes. Warriors may choose to follow the military road with us, but they should be warned that we take few adult fighting men into the legion - they are usually too set in their ways., but we need garrisons, auxiliary horsemen, men for the signal posts."

The signs were not encouraging, Cumbol's face showed that quite clearly he was not in favour of Lucius's plans. Enthusiasm would have been surprising, but Cumbol's emotions were plainly the very opposite. "What offends you Cumbol?"

"Offends me, Lord Lucius? Why would you think that the idea of our merchants, warriors and nobles becoming employees would be offensive?" The sarcasm spat from his tongue like venom from a viper.

"You think that I am taking advantage of your plight to insult you, denigrate your worth?" Lucius shook his head forcefully, "If you think that receiving silver and gold coin from his king makes a man a paid servant, then I am a paid servant indeed. Do you know what I have in my bank chest? A personal fortune of over two million sesterces. My centurions," He waved his hand to indicate the men outside, "received eighteen hundred sesterces from the town shares - that is in addition to booty and the sale of slaves." A wolfish smile lit his features at the dumbfounded expression on his companion's, "I reckon that the Brigante are about to make a substantial contribution to our income in the next week or two."

Lucius stood up and stretched, he had been sitting hunched forward addressing the headman for far too long, "No my friend, coin doesn't make a man an employee, any more than a chieftain's gifting to his warriors makes them servants. What we have in Camelod is a regulated share of the wealth that the industries earn and the legion wins.

"There's another thing. A man cannot fight all the time and enemies do not always carry much gold - they even die sometimes and deprive us of the slave price!" His laugh rang a little more brutally in his ears than Lucius had intended. "Never mind, we still get our just salary, our rations, houses and equipment - and the legion owns workshops and watermills too. That earns us the odd coin or two."

Turning back to the older man he looked down at him and said, "Tell me, Cumbol - how much booty have your warriors won for themselves this last year - and if the Brigante

come here and take your farms what other wealth will they have? Will Beturos gift your fugitives?

"No. I'm sorry to put it so cruelly my friend, but the truth is that at the moment you, your nobles, warriors, farmers and merchants have nothing, but what they can carry away. We are willing to offer an alternative. It is a different way of life to the one you are used to, but there is no loss of dignity. You may be offended by peasants being paid for their work and having their own small store of silver, houses that don't stink or let the rain in, but why? Does it make you a lesser man? Surely being headman of a village that is wealthy carries more prestige than being headman of a small collection of decent homesteads and a scattering of hovels?." Regarding Cumbol's somewhat sullen expression, Lucius realised that he was watching a man who had been swung from absolute despair at losing all he and his people had worked for over the years, to almost euphoria when Lucius and his cavalry had arrived to oppose the Brigante and miraculously save the settlement from conquest. Now he was looking at reality - a lot better situation than becoming despised refugees in Beturos, but something less than the miracle that would allow them to carry on as they had for generations.

"This is a matter that needs some quick decisions, but not everything needs to be settled now." Sitting down again so that they were once more at the same level, Lucius explained, "We must look to the immediate future. The Brigante will be here soon by your own estimate, and we should be ready to receive them, but we have enough men here to do that neatly enough. I can spare ten men and an optio to escort a delegation to Cantodunon, to see how we live. If they agree that that mode of life would be good for your people - and if you help us in defeating the Brigante, I can offer citizenship. That will mean that when the river is pacified, this port and settlement will be developed, you will have access to the civil facilities and the industries that we have in Cantodunon and our smaller settlements. Your young men can be accepted into the legion, your position here makes you the first port after Beturos - it should be much more extensive than it is right now - I don't believe that your people have thought of cultivating the land across the river, have they?"

"No, not yet -, but we have never had the manpower."

"You'll have it when the Brigante are defeated."

"Slaves?"

Lusius made an impatient gesture, "Not slaves. The warriors will either be sold off in Gaul or, possibly, a few taken into the legion. No, what I mean is the ordinary men and women of the tribes, maybe some traders and craftsmen, but I don't think that there are any merchants among them. They are not greatly different to you - or at least they won't be when they have had their warrior class removed. Well, do you accept my offer? Stay here and help us defeat the Brigante while a delegation visits Cantodunon and, if you wish it afterwards, you become a part of Camelod with full citizenship and you as magistrate of the settlement."

He waited while the man thought it over and then could not resist pointing out the obvious, "Or you leave now and we help you on your way, guard your backs - but whatever is here is then ours."

Eventually Cumbol made a wry face, shrugged his shoulders and admitted, "It is a very fair offer. It would be churlish to refuse." He drew in a deep breath and then made an admission, "You must forgive me for hesitating in the face of what can only be to our eventual advantage, but it is hard to relinquish our independence, " He raised a hand to halt Lucius's obvious intention to interrupt, "Yes, yes I know, the independence was illusory, but it was a comfortable illusion. We sent our crops to Beturos, they sent us goods that we needed, we took in grain, wool and other goods from upriver or over to the east and shipped it in boats that could sail the Abos in safety. We received silver for that. Nobody bothered us."

"Nobody from Beturos protected you either."

"True. And you will do that?"

"You'll do it yourselves, your boys and youths are free to join the Camelod legion just like any other citizens and the legion protects the settlement." He paused for a moment, "What do you call this place anyway?"

"Call it? We've never called it anything, but 'The settlement' or 'Home', there never seemed any need to do more."

"Well it will be named. If you decide to become part of Camelod you and the druids will choose a suitable name when, as new citizens, you make your oath to Lugh."

"Lugh?"

"Lugh. The settlement may have its' own patron, but Lugh is the God of Camelod and a small temple will be raised here in his honour."

"A God for a whole nation? Very strange."

Lucius gave him a quizzical look, there were stranger things in Camelod than a Universal God. However...

"Well we need to organise defences and you should send off your delegation to Cantodunon before things become exciting. ... There is one thing though, you indicated that there are other settlements to the east of here."

Cumbol cocked his head quizzically, "Did you not know? There are ten or twelve hundred farmers and herders, spread about over the next twenty miles or so. It's their produce that sits in the warehouses at the quayside."

"Well, well. At a guess I would think that that represents a lot of food for Beturos?"

Cumbol shook his head, "Oh no, it mainly gets sold to Gaul and the Roman army - and I'm told by the dealer in Beturos that they do not pay well."

It was Lucius's turn to look quizzical, "And your opinion of that?"

"There's not much we could do about it, Beturos controls the seagoing ships. Should we refuse to sell? No Lucius, we make the best of it - and we are ... were comfortable here. It was of no great importance."

"You'll find that citizens of Camelod get a fair deal from shippers and merchants. Mainly because they have to compete, Beturons, independent foreign traders and the town's own traders." He stood again slapped his leg to bring the muscle back to life again and waved Cumbol through the door ahead of him as they went back to the others.

Within an hour a detail had been ordered to escort ten of the settlement's men and women (no peasant labourers Lucius noted without surprise), to Cantodunon and they set off in one of the boats that obviously belonged to the little port.

Before the boat had gone more than a few strokes away from the quay Lucius was ordering the making of defences. It was an open defence. Two palisades were built to make a corner of what appeared to be a completely walled camp. One end, butted onto

the bank, but where another wall would have paralleled it was simply open. The other palisade ran at right angles to it. Punic ditches twelve feet wide with a boarded ankle breaker slot at the bottom, were dug in front of the ten foot high walls which were formed from young tree trunks a hand span in diameter and earthen banks, and a fighting platform hung behind the palisade resting on a meagre earth bank inside the wall. The whole thing was built to make sure that the Brigante could not simply flood the defences with men. Three of the ballista were mounted, one at each end of the walls and one at the junction, the other five were made up into an over-sized battery and would accompany the century of cavalry when the attack came. The manning of the wall was to be the responsibility of the Parisi men with a half century of legionaries as a reserve. That left six hundred heavy infantry whom Lucius concentrated in two groups.

Building the walls did not take more than a day, with the help of the Parisi there was a total of over eleven hundred pairs of hands and each wall was only a hundred yards long. In the days that followed there were moments of friction between the Parisi and the Camelodeans. The non-appearance of Brigante half persuaded the inhabitants that their haste to evacuate had been unnecessary and, what was worse, led to Camelod having a claim on their property now. Most of the chief men however, were sure that the invasion would come and lent their voices to keeping the peace. Lucius took the opportunity to train the Infantry in the tactics and manoeuvres that he intended to use. It was much the same as deploying two cohorts, but, and it was a very important 'but' - each cohort had only three hundred men instead of eight hundred. Depending on the size and deployment of the host that would attack the fortifications, they would either form two fronts of a hundred yards length and only three men deep or seventy yards with a reserve line behind the first three.

That was the simple part. The troops would be out of sight when hostilities broke out, standing in column three abreast where the third wall would have been. When they deployed the first cohort would trot around the wall parallel to the river and the mobile ballista would trot out level with the junction of the two cohorts - driving in line abreast. There was then a choice of commands that Lucius had to make. If the Brigante were lapping forward around the corner of the walls the cohorts would form line abreast successively with the ballista between them. The mobiles would halt fifty yards from the enemy and discharge as much as they could before the second cohort overtook them and took up station to form one line. The ballista were free then to join the cavalry in harassing the flank of the Brigante.

If the attack was concentrated on the north facing wall, the first cohort would wheel left forming a line the ballista would follow, forming up on their flank fifty yards back and

discharge their bolts at the attackers until the second cohort closed the gap and contained the Brigante between them and the defenders of the wall. The ballista would then join with the cavalry in attacking the rear of the enemy.

It looked very simple on the sand map that Lucius drew for his officers, and the cornet calls that gave the commands were simple and not easily misunderstood., but three days of practice showed ample scope for confusion, the worst of which left the second cohort running down the ballista when they halted to shoot. There were two days of grace after Lucius declared himself satisfied and practice continued. The expedition had brought rations with them in the boats, sufficient for two months, but it did not include fresh meat of course. The area teemed with sheep and it would have been ridiculous to deny the men the fresh meat they considered their due - when available. The sheep belonged to the Parisi, or had done until they had decided to abandon the settlement. Now they belonged to Camelod - theoretically. The trouble that caused revealed itself almost immediately, and eventually, in the interests of good relations between the two groups, Lucius broke into his store of silver and paid about half their market value. He was determined not to give the impression that Camelod would pay through the nose if pushed hard.

Lucius also made use of this space of time, to clear away the hovels to the east so that the cavalry and ballista would have plenty of room to manoeuvre. Using wagons and horses, much of the rubble and the rubbish left from felling the trees was laid out in heaps to make the approach to the walls difficult and flight from the walls even more difficult, long curving 'roads' were left clear for the convenience of the cavalry and ballista. The arrangements were totally unrecognisable from ground level, but Lucius directed the work from a temporary tower twenty feet tall and four days after the work of preparation had begun it was complete and awaiting the assault.

The land expedition

The complete force of Camelodians and Parisi numbered more than sixteen hundred by the time they had laid out nine signal stations and covered eighteen miles; the ninth station was built into the first fortlet that they built. Large enough for a century of cavalry the fortlet measured thirty five yards on each side and contained four horse lines, a tent principia for the centurion and optios, store rooms and five barrackrooms. Ballista were installed over the four simple gatehouses, two to each gate with a range of five hundred yards - just the distance to the cleared land around the fortlet. Two days were taken over this task and then the expedition set off again leaving a full strength cavalry garrison and a signals party for the semaphore.

Their route had brought them over a high ridge that carried an old track running to the north west, travelling had been fairly easy, the ground was hard, there had been no more snow and the legionary engineers dealt rapidly with their task of improving the route so that it could serve as a service road when a proper, paved one was built. In the meantime it was expected that this temporary road surface would play its part in building communications along the eastern flank of this land. Once over the ridge however, they were into a long valley whose main river was the Hull but the land was so rich in streams and small rivers draining into the Hull and a couple of small rivers that paralleled its course, that the whole progress of the expedition was slowed right down. Track improvement - and now it was clear that if an old track had once run along this valley, it had disappeared long ago - was a matter of building from scratch. In places there were cattle paths but these only followed the expedition's intended route until the animals had reached the first rivulet that they found too tedious to cross and turned off to follow the bank to the slopes of the ridge. Road building and establishing signal stations decreased the average distance traveled over three days to a little under five miles a day.

Unwilling to dawdle in this fashion the mounted Parisi rode off to the west every morning, scouting well out from the route and, more importantly in this uninhabited land, hunting. That was one benefit of travelling so slowly, there was plenty of meat for the cookpots. The valley was still lush with last summer's grass and promised good grazing so long as the winter winds did not come from the north or east. Despite the number of streams that ran down the sides of the valley, the land was well drained rather than boggy, most streams staying confined within banks of limestone until they reached the main drain of the Hull. It seemed good land for raising cattle and horses and yet it was bare of farms and no one had yet seen the cattle that had made the tracks they followed from time to time. It was puzzling. A few ruined buildings had been found along the Hull and the remains of bothies on the ridge, but there was no knowing how old these were.

"Raiders." Was Driscoll's immediate response when Aiden raised the matter of the mysterious lack of people, "Sea raiders. We are only fifteen or twenty miles from the coast and a long easy beach for them to land on. Kierha will tell you, it was a favourite way for sailors (and not just pirates), to refurbish their stores. Particularly the men from the far north, their own lands do not carry large herds and buying beef and mutton for the voyage to Hispania was expensive." He shrugged his impressive shoulders, "Traders have to keep their overheads low, you know." and a piratical grin lifted the red bush of his moustache.

"Traders?" Aiden had learned from Gregory and Lucius to collect of any information that might conceivably show commercial advantage, "What do they trade, surely if they are starved of land .."

"No, I didn't say they were starved of it, " Driscoll could be pedantic when he had a mind to it, "it just doesn't support large farms.. Hmm. What do they trade? Well, walrus ivory .."

"What ivory?"

"Walrus. It's a huge sea creature with long fangs in its upper jaw, creamy white and the Spanish carve it into decorative ware for Rome mostly, some jewellery but mainly ornaments. Then there's amber, a golden stone that floats - they find it along the shores of their sea. That's prized by the Spanish and many other nations, but the thing that is even more valuable is ambergris a foul smelling substance thrown up by the sea and used for perfumes - I never did understand that. Iron - very good iron - it doesn't have that smell of sulphur that ours has when its smelted. They're good enamellers and goldsmiths too. Oh there's a lot that they trade with the south and they bring back silver ingots and gold, silk, dyestuffs. There's a very profitable trade between north and south."

"And the sea's quite narrow here, isn't it?" The speculative expression on Aiden's face, brought a grin to Driscoll's ruddy features.

"You wish you had a navy, eh." He guffawed, "Well the Romans have already tried that and their ships couldn't get near the northerners most of the time - and when they did, it was a harder fight than they relished. Shipboard fighting isn't the same as a land battle - very difficult to maintain a disciplined front of legionaries unless you can get on board very quickly. And the northern ships don't have much in the way of decks for a century to fight on - it becomes a very personal affair, one man against another. Northerners standing a head taller than the Roman and swinging an axe or a long, two handed sword that'll hack through legionary shields and armour very quickly. The empire tends to leave them to get on with their business."

"Interesting though."

Driscoll gave him a quizzical look and then rode off to join the hunt that was just assembling.

Aiden carried on with his surveying notes, a few fortlets and signal posts would curb any casual raiding and this land could support large herds. There was plentiful limestone, most

of it freestone that split up into roughly rectangular slabs that needed little work by the stone mason - and water power to run the copper bladed saws that could make it convenient and attractive to export. So far the engineers had not found any evidence of iron or other ores, but the stone cutting alone would make a lucrative industry - and with the amount of building and road making that Camelod was undertaking, there was not going to be a shortage of work for the quarries and watermills.

Another twenty miles and five days further on they had reached the end of the valley and built another fortlet - and all without any sign of opposition, or any people. The expedition was now crossing the high ground that closed off the northern end of the low lands they had been travelling. Before them another valley ran east and west, with a maze of streams and small rivers, this land certainly had no lack of water. According to Kierha the Derwent was there somewhere and reached the sea just south of an outcropping of black rock that made a good landfall for watering after the crossing from Rhinemouth. It was an exposed landing though and only approached in good weather and a western wind. To the south east the ground rose steeply again, which (again according to Kierha), indicated that they were now within ten miles of the coast. With the completion of the fortlet overlooking the Derwent valley the weather abruptly grew fierce, cutting winds swept down from the high ground, bringing mounds of dry snow in one night that rolled and drifted across the tracks and gullies so that it was impossible to travel. The walls of the fort did not encompass enough ground for the expedition and so the marching camp was built against the western wall of the fortlet affording some shelter, but it was minimal. The ground was too hard by now to do more than scratch shallow ditches and the fortlet itself was really in embryo form only. Aiden did not consider that it was necessary to spend labour on improving the ditches - who was going to attack them in this weather? The legion and Parisi spent as much time as they could making the most of the materials they had in the fort and around them on the hillside. It was not sufficient.

Wagonloads of board had travelled with them in sufficient quantity to build the barracks and there was brushwood locally that they cut to trap the snow and form windbreaks for the horse lines and the tents, but it was hard living and when the wind dropped, reconnoitering parties were sent out to seek a more sheltered spot with running water. Fortunately the brushwood and small trees supplied a reasonable amount of fuel and when a suitable little valley was found about one hundred feet above the broad valley floor, that had plenty of timber too. Rude huts were made from saplings, brushwood and snow packed hard against them; boards were available for a dozen roofs, but the rest were 'thatched' in rudimentary fashion with frozen sod hacked from the ground. They leaked melted snow abominably, but the new camp was livable - just.

Four weeks were spent in these conditions before a brief thaw at the end of December brought water streaming off the roofs, but allowed the making of mud to supply a more durable cladding for the walls. The boardbuilt barracks at the fortlet were dismantled and the material transported to the camp where it could be used more efficiently in making a group of interconnecting buildings. These provided better housing for eating at least and most of the troops were able to spend part of their day in warm, dry conditions. There was no stabling for the horses however, they stood miserably in their lines, or were exercised in small paddocks that were free of deep ruts and crevices (free of them because they had been filled with stones and mud). Frequent currying kept the mounts fairly fit and watering was no problem, but the expedition still lost twelve to disease and three to broken legs despite the labour spent on making the paddocks safe.

Eight more weeks passed and then cold weather let up with a sudden thaw that brought the water rushing from the hills, mud and rock slides - and two weeks when it was almost completely impossible to leave the camp. Camelod's soldiers were practised in marching camps and winter conditions, but these months had been more severe than anything they had experienced - the Parisi were not experienced in winter campaigning. Weather at sea could be even more fearsome, but exposure to it never lasted for long, if a ship could not get to a safe port it was very likely to sink in extended bad weather - sailors were unlikely to suffer conditions of cold and piercing winds for more than seven or ten days at a time.

Halfway through their enforced encampment a mild fever swept through the expedition, it had very little effect on general health, but it was followed by a more serious illness that brought high fever, difficult breathing and blinding headaches to about a fifth of the personnel. It was brief - lasting for three days in each patient at its worst, but it killed five of the Parisi. Aiden and Piso considered that it was a matter of morale. The legion prided itself on having trained hard in all weathers. The Parisi were civilians and warriors, no training had ever been given to them and the five that died seemed to do so simply because they were totally defeated by their state of living.

The commanders of the joint force met almost every day, but until the beginning of March, with the onset of bright, cool weather and a decline in the water spilling into the numerous streams and rivulets, there was hardly anything useful to discuss apart from their constant efforts to ameliorate conditions. Ten days into March however, the morning revealed soft, but sound footing for the horses, no wind and the promise of a sunny day. Kierha declared that she was ready to make the promised scouting expedition to the coast to see if they could discover what was happening in Brido (if that was truly its name). Were the three ships still drawn up at the quayside? What had they been doing there anyway? What was happening now?

Kierha's original proposition was to take a scouting party of Parisi warriors only, but after a prolonged discussion with Cullom, Driscoll and Aiden, it was decided that eight cavalymen would accompany them under the command of Lerwan, a recently made up centurion. He was a man that had served under Aiden for five years now - long service in the budding Camelodian legion - and was thoroughly reliable. Very little preparation was needed and the party left camp on foot well before midday, together with a general exodus of men exercising horses, heading for the woods for fuel and building material, or hunting. After so many days in the cold, drear camp it was a noisy and cheerful business, and after a while the camp was left almost empty, gently steaming in the spring sunshine. Kierha headed roughly south east across the hills, with only a vague idea of the position of Brido - and that based on her sea experience of the distance between the Black Rocks and the small settlement. Useful information, but only if one really knew how far it was from the marching camp to the coast. They stuck to the high ground, not a good place for scouting, but there seemed to be no human activity once they had left the camp behind (this land looked to be truly a deserted area) and the low ground to their right was a long bowl in the hills, which even from a distance, looked to be absolutely sodden. For a time their path veered to the east, but then, as they drew level with the end of the bowl, the land slanted down to the coast and they could see the great headland ahead of them, probably about five miles away. If it was five miles, and Lerwan was willing to take Kierha's word for it, then Brido was almost due south-east. They headed south-east again and after a couple of hours were rewarded by the sight of the bay and Brido, fast disappearing into the gloom cast by the setting sun. No ships could be seen, but the shadow was intense - and it was a couple of miles away at least,

"We camp at the nearest decent spot." Announced Kierha, "Much too dark down there to risk an approach from the west with the evening sky behind - and I think it's freezing again."

One of the Parisi almost shouted, "That's a sheep down there.", and pointed to a hollow half a mile away.

"Ha!" Kierha was delighted, there had been no fresh meat for four or five weeks now, "Thank you Sucellos, thank you." Abruptly attending to the practical matter of translating the prospect of red meat to roasting joints, she despatched five of her scouts to surround the hollow and garner the sheep.

"I hope it's not been out of grazing for too long, it won't be fat, but I don't want it stringy. Do you think she was trapped in the snow?", turning to Lerwan. "If not there may be a shepherd looking for her." It was too late to warn the hunters without shouting and

unnecessary anyway, they were as familiar with the ways of sheep and shepherds as she was. They watched anxiously as the tiny figures carefully surrounded the lone animal and then closed in on it, they could not hear, but Lerwan at least could vividly imagine the panicking bleats as the sheep watched the humans advance in a way that her shepherd never had done. The bleats, actual and imagined, did not last long and a short time later, the blood stained skin was slowly freezing on the grass and the party was gathered around a small fire, built into a convenient niche in the hillside that the loose stones had been scraped out of; nobody built a fire on wet stone twice in their lifetime.

It was not exactly a fat beast, but it wasn't skinny either, "That animal's been housed over winter, best bury the skin before we leave - and the bones too."

Rations had not been short over the last few weeks, but the fresh meat brought from Beturos had been finished shortly after the beginning of January and since then the diet had mainly consisted of grain, pulses, dried fish and smoked mutton and pork. The Celtic appetite for meat had been sadly restricted for more than fifty days. Mutton never tasted so good.

"Make sure that the fire is banked well tonight, we'll make an early start in the morning and I want a hot meal before we set out." Kierha had a healthy respect for her men's health and morale. A hot meal of pease pudding with the rest of the roast mutton chopped up into it, would compensate for a long crawl through the short wet grass and brush as they grew near whatever waited in Brido. Blankets were unrolled from the packhorses, saddles removed, the horses settled for the night hitched to independent lines - and the fire banked with turves that had been drying in front of it all night. They turned in.

There was a sea mist lying across the headland and the lower lying Brido and the whole area around the quay was invisible to the armoured men lying a quarter of a mile away on an isolated little ridge west of the settlement - if there really was a settlement. As the sun rose the mist turned rosy pink, shot through with black shadows cast by uneven ground and rocks, it was a fleeting effect, they disappeared as the sun cleared the horizon, but the mist still hung over the coastline. The scouts and cavalrymen fretted as the sun lifted, the mist was slow to burn off, fed as it was by a constant waft of warm air off the sea and onto the chill of the land. It was not until the sun was a good handspan above the horizon that the mist finally shredded away and revealed ... very little!

"What in Hades has happened to it?" Kierha wanted to know. Lerwan bit his tongue, it was perfectly clear what had happened to the settlement - it had been abandoned. "The quay is there Kierha."

"Yes!" Silence, a threatening silence that dared anyone else to make an obvious remark. "Well, there's no point lying here in the damp, let's get down there and see what is left - but carefully, there might be someone in residence still. And if they're being secretive about it, it might be because we were spotted last night and they want a chat." She quelled the laughter with a gesture, "I will go ahead with two men," pointing to two of the Parisi, "the rest of you, divide up and flank us about five paces away and a couple of paces behind. ... And take it slowly - keep station on me."

They walked slowly in formation up to the first of the thatched huts, and Kierha poked her head inside as they halted. She had no difficulty seeing inside, there were great holes in the roof where the thatch had blown away. "Nothing!" She announced, "No people, no food, no tools - just empty."

All the other huts were empty too, twenty one of them. Some were in better condition than others and it took longer to search their gloomy interiors, but not one had anything to indicate when they had been deserted. Even the straw or bracken, or whatever was used as bedding locally was gone. When they had finished with the huts, they walked in silence to the quay unsure whether the emptiness was due to a great tragedy or a voluntary emmigration. The very bareness of the huts indicated the latter, but why take the trouble to clear them out so thoroughly?

The quay (really a simple jetty thrusting out from the pebble shore), posed another problem. All the timbers seemed to have been cut and lashed together fairly recently, "Not more than twelve months, considering that we are just leaving winter behind." Lerwen, had a legionary's engineering experience. The deterioration of ropes, the appearance of cut surfaces after exposure to the weather and the onset of decay were an important part of his expertise and these ropes were salted of course, but there were very few broken fibres and many of the sawn logs still had the torn wood that was dragged away when one piece of timber was parted from another.

They walked up and down the jetty, trying to gain some information from it, but beyond the indications of age - or rather youth - there was nothing to learn. It was a solid piece of work, competently put together - and it had withstood the winter storms, but what else?

"That sheep came from somewhere," Bryon, one of the Parisi announced, "shouldn't we look for the shepherd?" It was a point that they had all forgotten, Kierha clicked her tongue in exasperation, she was leader of this expedition and the sheep's presence in well fed condition needed explanation.

"Yes," She said, "the sheep." Leaning back against one of the pilings of the jetty she scanned the gentle slope of land occupied by huts and then the hillside beyond. There were certainly no other buildings in sight - although 'building' was over inflated description of the usual shepherd's bothy. She was certain now that whoever had lived in this settlement had either left by sea or gone inland, voluntarily or involuntarily. "Pair off and search the hillsides from there ..." Her finger indicated a sweep that included the ridge immediately behind the settlement and the high ground to the south. They had already traversed the land to the north.

"We'll meet again at midday at the camp - and if anyone finds another sheep, don't let it go to waste....But bury the skin and grallock, and disguise the hole." For a moment she watched to make sure that they were evenly dispersing in the directions of their search and then she gestured to the man she had kept back as her own companion and trotted off to the extreme south. More than an hour passed, time enough to search the high ground to a radius of a mile - although a well concealed cave would have slipped their notice. It was within half an hour of midday and the soldiers began to reappear on the low ground behind the village, one of them was carrying a skinned and cleansed sheep across his shoulders, while his companion carried his armour, to save it from the corrosion of blood.

Kierha was last to arrive at the little camp ground - she had furthest to travel. Their behaviour puzzled her, but then after asking for reports, "You found nobody? Not even the shepherd?"

The man who had been carrying the sheep's carcass shook his head and said, "No Lady. Just sheep.", and he grinned.

"Well how come they are being fed? There must have been someone to look after them over winter?"

"I reckon they looked after themselves. See there's this little hollow up there," one hand waved vaguely in the direction of the hillside, "there's a cave well not a cave exactly, but a deep overhang of rock. Someone had built their bothy under it and a store for feed, hay and roots you know."

"I know what you feed sheep on. Get on with it man, wasn't the shepherd there?"

"No. Nor hadn't been for a long while I think. Then there was this small flock of sheep, a dozen maybe - perhaps more ... Less, I suppose." He hurried on at the look of impatience his commander gave him, "Well, somehow they'd got in and were helping themselves. It was probably enough to feed a much larger flock and there's still plenty left -, but, of course they prefer the fresh grass. It's not good for them though, there was a dead one there too - reckon it were bloat from too much spring grass."

"Thank you. Is that all? No dead shepherd?"

He shook his head, "If there had been, see, there would have been a larger flock or a lot of dead sheep -, but there weren't. Just the ten or twelveor maybe..."

"Enough!" She stared at the men, "No settlers, no ships, no sheep, no shepherds. What in Hades has been going on?"

It was Bryon who answered her, if it could be called an answer, "It looks as though they all got up and left. The people took their goods, the shepherds took their sheep, but it was all in a bit of hurry - they didn't get the whole flock. Some were left behind."

Kierha kicked at a loose sod drawn away that morning from the banked fire, "Look, let's get that sheep, butchered, we'll roast some of it now and then get down to the village and choose the cleanest huts for our overnight quarters. Did anybody see a garden down there?"

"Yes Lady," said Cullochán, the man who had brought the animal. "Four or five, I saw. The cabbages had all been cut, but there may be some root vegetables there - carrots, parsnips, pig-nuts."

"There may well be, let's hope they didn't have time to dig up everything."

The meal of roast mutton and camp bread was soon prepared, the meat cut from the haunches as it cooked - and just as quickly despatched. They had daylight to make a choice of huts and their hunt amongst the gardens discovered carrots (a recent import from Gaul) and, behind one of the huts a rack of beans high up under the shelter of the overhanging thatch, still on the bine, dry and wholesome. The iron pot that had held pease pudding that morning was filled with the remains of the mutton, beans, water and the black

seeds from a row of Jack 'i' the hedge to add a bit of bite, and put onto a low fire to cook slowly.

"We found no eggs." Exclaimed Bryon suddenly.

"They even chased up the hens and took those? Remarkable." Kierha could see no really logical answer to the puzzle. "A raid from the sea - those three ships perhaps?"

"Disease?" Bryon suggested, "but there's no grave or funerary fires."

"Can we work out how long they had lived here?" Lerwen's question took them by surprise. Nobody had thought in those terms, The jetty had not been there more than twelve months, they knew that, but the huts?

"You think that they came, stayed a short time and then were taken away again by the ships?" They all looked at Kierha, for her to take that statement further. "How large would you think the flocks would be Cullochán - based on the amount of winter fodder stored by the bothy?"

"Lady, how can I tell? Certainly more than the twelve I saw."

"Yes, I know that much, but sheep would not eat the stores evenly, they'd take what they could get at - and being sheep, they would all tend to take from the same place. Whoever stocked the fodder would have done it methodically - you cannot simply stand at the doorway and throw it in. The food has got to be stacked to make best use of the space. So how much remained that the sheep hadn't disordered? What portion of the space occupied by food was still fairly neat - a tenth? A twentieth?" Kierha demanded.

The man closed his eyes, trying to recall the appearance of the store house, holding his hands out in front of him about a foot apart and 'chopping' them into an imagined space. "Er.mm..about twenty five, twenty sixsomething like that."

"And you saw ten or twelve that had been feeding there? Then there must have been around three hundred or more, because the shepherd would not have fed them as liberally as they fed themselves. Let's say three hundred sheep and twenty one huts - would you guess at sixty or seventy men?" There was a desultory round of agreement - most of the men were only agreeing because that was what you did when Kierha posed questions like that. The others (except Lerwen), could not follow her logic, but felt that there must be something in it.

"Well, let's get bedding sorted out, and something to sit on round the fire this evening," She rubbed her back ruefully, "standing around like this makes my back ache."

There was not much in the way of logs or smooth boulders, "What had the previous people sat on?" Kierha wondered, "Surely they wouldn't have taken boulders and log seats with them?" Shaking her head, Kierha came to the conclusion that they never would learn what had happened to the settlers, every time they looked around with speculative eyes they saw something that made the puzzle more obscure. Well, it would make conversation around the fire tonight. Next day it began to rain again and they got back to the main party after taking four hours to cover three miles. Nobody dared enquire of Kierha what had been discovered at the coast, she retired to her quarters with a flagon of the strong mead and was not seen by anyone except her personal servant bringing food - nothing ever reduced Kierha's appetite - for two days.

A messenger arrived from Lucius that day (she might not have come out for another few days otherwise), and handed over the packet. A council was called and after questioning the messenger about conditions between the camp and the Ouse, and a look outside by Gwillam, the weather prophet, it was decided that the march could not start until the weather dried up - and not immediately then. The messenger was fed, given a bed and despatched back to Lucius first thing next morning.

The Ouse.

January 42AD

The few men who had been at Windubro two years ago, felt a sense of deja vu, as the Brigante came out of the woods on a broad front. There were the splendidly decorated warrior chieftains and their bodyguards, helmeted, bare chested, shoulders cloaked in bright tartans of red, green, blue and yellow - and arms encircled with bronze and gold torcs gifted for some service to their leader. Behind them, the common warriors with helmets and only the occasional sign of battle wealth - and that among the older men, not fit for the bodyguard, but respected for past deeds. The throng jostled for position in front of the trees, closing towards their centre for the chance to be first at the wall where the Parisi, waved their weapons and shouted insults. Three days of Lucius's training had gone for nothing. They leapt and pranced along the walls, jeering and making obscene gestures - every bit as barbaric and unsoldierly as their enemies. The Camelodian reserve regarded them with a calm superiority that looked odd on men who were about half the age of the Parisi.

Behind the wall, the legion ordered itself into the new formations that Lucius had exercised them in. Two short infantry cohorts in column of fours, cavalry to the flank and ballistas between the cohorts. There was bustling as they perfected their lines and then silence while they waited for the cornet call.

It took a good half hour for the Brigante to assemble their host and then with a cacophony of blown horns and battle cries it sprang forward. Lucius might have sneered at their lack of order and discipline, but even his heart thudded a little heavier at the sight. Two thousand men trotted across the rubble scattered field; the leaders whooping and dancing in front, whirling swords around their heads, tossing shield arms high and turning to exhort their followers to feats of heroism. The promises of battle wealth to the worthy were generous - probably foolhardy - but they would be kept and every man there knew it. A leader's honour fed on the wealth he won and then gave away. They were halfway across the field before Lucius gave the order for the ballista men on the walls to begin their bombardment. At two hundred yards the bolts from even these light, mobile weapons did not stop at the first body it pierced. When one struck it passed clean through, throwing the body to one side or backwards and carried on to bury itself in another. If it struck the edge of a shield it would deflect slightly, catch on the shield or man behind and most likely rotate madly, slashing and wounding three or four - like a rabid dog chasing its tail.

The horde barely shuddered, the momentum was there to carry them forward over the bodies and they only had to absorb two more discharges before the ditch was reached and they poured down it. The ankle-breaker slot at the bottom, stiffened with boards, did its job and casualties piled up and then were trodden down as warriors hurled themselves up the shallow angle of the puny ditch. Spears and small boulders rained down from the Parisi on the battlements, there were no ladders amongst the warriors who had charged the wall, because its height was totally unexpected. They had seen it from the woods, but at five hundred yards and with a ridge of soil from the digging piled in front of the ditch, the height of the wall was much diminished. They had decided that it made no difference - they were two thousand strong, they knew that the Parisi of the riverport were much fewer in numbers. All they needed for victory was courage and determination to swamp the defence.

Dungan, primus of Cantodunon took the first infantry cohort, Caroc seconded from Windubro took the second. At the first cornet call, Dungan led his men beyond the end of the wall and turned left at the trot, The ballistas followed behind in a single line, then the second cohort. Off to the flank the single cavalry century under Bodu gradually overtook the infantry, just reaching ahead of them when they reached the front wall of the defences

and the battle came into view. The infantry went unnoticed by most of the Brigantes who were concentrating on the fighting below the wall. Dungan continued the trot parallel to the Brigante flank until the rear of the second cohort had a clear view and then halted his men. A double cornet call faced the line left, the ballistas were unhitched, the restraining pegs were driven into the soft earth and then they began their bombardment of the Brigante from the flank. There were only five machines, but the teams had practised for a year or more and could maintain a rate of discharge that ensured six bolts or stone bags every minute. They aimed at the walls, secure in the knowledge that the Parisi stood ten feet above the flight of shot and the effect was devastating. If a bolt failed to find a body it stuck in the wall, but when the stones missed they burst on the wall producing a hail of missiles that probably did not kill, but wounded a dozen men.

It could not pass unnoticed, the left flank of the horde faced the ballistas and began picking their way through the windrows of brushwood and stones that lay across the field. The ballistas promptly hitched up again and withdrew while the second cohort closed up to cover the gap and present a full line of shields. The cavalry had ridden onto one of the 'roadways' and now drove across the rear of the Brigante while the ballistas unhitched again and hurled bolts diagonally across the body of the horde. It did not deter the line of warriors now charging the cohort's line of shields, their own shields were up and they were avid to vent their anger on men who were not protected by ditches, walls and ballista bolts. They came on, seething with hate and loathing for men who made war in such a fashion and met the first flight of pilum with a groan, a second flight struck them, biting through the gaps where shields had been dragged down by the weight of two or three of the javelins. Men died in tens, but the wall of charging men was still solid, and as they neared the Camelodian lines the second and third ranks put their shoulders to the backs of the men in the front to take the shock. The crash of shield on shield was terrific, the Brigante bouncing back from shields that had the weight of three men behind them, and then the swords licked out from the spaces between the shields and the killing began. Here and there the line broke and warriors were able to cut a space for their long swords, but then that part of the reserve line would form an inverted 'V' and close their shields around the intrusion of Brigante warriors, crushing them closer and stabbing low between the shields. There were casualties in the line, but few deaths and the Brigante had lost their momentum long ago, only individual heroism kept them fighting and that was slowly eroded by the grim efficiency of the Camelodian killing machine. These men practised every day with the wooden swords that were twice the weight of a steel gladius, they could use those weapons for as much as two hours at a time, the gladius by contrast seemed feather light and, while they kept their edge, they withdrew from their victims with very little effort. The steady double line had no difficulty in cutting down their opponents, the stabbing blades occasionally synchronising so that a score of warriors screamed together

as the swords stabbed forward between the rectangular shields. Every so often, when the centurions considered the front too cluttered by dead and dying, the cornet would bray a command and the front line would take five considered steps back through the reserve line - which then did the same thing. There was space in front now, the ground was clean and free of blood and faeces - firm to the footing of the legionaries and as the unwary Brigante advanced into the cleared area, the killing continued.

Behind the fighting line fully half of the warriors were struggling to shield themselves from the ballista, which paused to fire a couple of shots and then dashed to another position. It was dangerous on the rubble strewn field - they had lost any exact idea of position long ago, two machines broke wheels and the men were lucky to escape on the horses. Cavalry attacks on the Brigante succeeded in protecting the ballista to a certain extent, but there were still a thousand enraged warriors milling about in the centre of the field and the cavalry forays were short jabs that plunged into the body of warriors, cut out a few, killed and then charged away again. They were having an effect on the Brigante, but they were only eighty horsemen at the start and had their own casualties. Bodu called them and the ballista out of reach on the Brigante's left flank. The ballista began shooting again at a range of three hundred paces, targeting the central body.

It was enough to begin a retreat from that area of the battle. Brigante began streaming away into the woods again and suddenly the warriors fighting the Camelodian infantry found that there was space behind them - a space that Bodu quickly took advantage of, launching a charge with lances against the Brigante rear. The battle was over in a few more minutes, even disciplined soldiers would have surrendered when attacked from front and rear, particularly with their flank still being torn by the wall artillery. The Brigante were not disciplined, they were brave, formidable in their battle rage, but rage subsides quickly when supplanted by fear. As they threw down their weapons, Dungan's cornuto sounded a cease fire and the Camelodians began the task of rounding up prisoners and binding them. The fetters that had first been used at the Wrekin were standard issue now, four sets to a man, and the Brigante were swiftly made helpless.

The Camelodian wounded were sent back to Cantodunon, twenty five of them being taken in one of the eight expeditionary boats. Fifteen dead Camelodians and twenty Parisi were buried or cremated according to the tribal customs. There was a greater number of Parisi dead - for the simple reason that they became excited in the battle and exposed themselves to javelins from below. A little training would probably have saved all of them

Lucius thought regretfully - it only confirmed his opinion of warriors in general. Very brave, but usually quite reckless.

It seemed that a very short time had elapsed after the boat had left before there was an arrival at the dockside. Fortunate Voyager berthed and discharged the Parisi delegation who had visited Cantodunon, two centuries of infantry, a cargo of boards, four large battlement ballista and eight smaller ones and ten tons of rations - enough for ten days if nothing more was available - it was a safety measure.

There was also a sealed letter for Lucius from Gregory.

"Dear Brother,

I am quite sure that you have dealt satisfactorily with the unexpected influx of Brigantes - we look forward to the spoils! As you will soon learn, the delegation from the Parisi riverport is much impressed with Cantodunon, our industries and, of course, your legion. The terms of citizenship that you offered have been ratified with the High Council, and you have our caveat to recruit the other Parisi in the area. Incidentally the two hundred or so refugees who fled the settlement first, should return very shortly, so you will not lack for labour. It was also agreed that the Parisi who fought on the wall should receive a legionary's share regardless of what rank they take when they become citizens.

It seems to me that, having had this one surprise it would be well to remain where you are until spring. The time can be put to good use in completing the fortifications and building barracks, housing and the usual civic and military offices. We should build for a garrison of cavalry and infantry, about two centuries of each should be enough to control the river completely. As you will see I have sent four large ballistas and eight of the smaller ones. Heron's fire shot are included too with materials for a floating beacon - for night time control of river traffic.

I was fascinated by your defence system. A local trader watched most of the attack from safety and reported it in glowing detail. I've never heard of building a half fort!, but there's a lot to commend the practice - as you have just proved.

I will send messengers to Aiden and Keirha next month, when they should have begun the fort on the Derwent, and order half their strength to march west until they can join up with you. You had best send a scouting party off at that time to find a route and then guide them back - we still have no maps of the area, of course. This will bring your strength up to ten centuries of infantry, five of cavalry, sixteen mobile ballistas and around four hundred Parisi horsemen. Choose your own time when your little army is complete, and scour the

length of the Ouse and Wharfe, I think we should take all the farmland and woodland and shorten the border with the Brigante to the foothills along the western range. At least one of the delegation knew the Wharfe well and calculated that there are around twenty thousand Carveti still living there under the rule of the Federation. Do you think you can recruit a full legion there?

Heron is convinced that his reaping machine will work better than the old Gaulish one that we brought over three years ago. The Parisi say that the land is good grain growing soil, a few roads and a protected route along the Ouse and we should soon have a very profitable grain trade through Beturos with Gaul and Lower Germania and the Rhine forts.

Don't rush anything now, consolidate the riverport, reconnoitre and be ready when the reinforcements from the Derwent expedition arrive in the spring. If you need more troops from the two towns just ask, we don't seem to have any problems at the moment.

Good fortune to you,

Gregory.

Lucius finished the letter and then sat down on the camp bed. He had been thinking of carrying on to the next river settlement, pursuing their original plan, they certainly had enough strength to follow that course, but they could not do that and leave the port secure, now that they knew the Brigante were on the river in strength. It had not been thought that there would be any conflict until they had reached up river twenty miles or so. Never mind, he mused, three months spent training new recruits would be more than useful and during that time they could make a start on improving the settlement and making it into a proper town with an administration.

The country was too flat for any industry that relied on watermills, but it was good farming land and with some organisation and some road building it could, as Gregory had pointed out, produce a very useful grain harvest - and breed horses! They were certainly going to need more horses. Yes, he thought, he could make very good use of the next three months. Above all else, though, it could be a very good recruiting and training ground. With the Brigante to the west and other large, warlike populations to the north, the legion could be relied on to earn its living in terms of booty and slaves for the next few years. Before they ran out of hostile tribesmen, they would have laid roads, straightened rivers - and built watermills in the high ground that the Brigante occupied now. With transportation and organisation this would be very rich country indeed.

January AD 42

Afondun

Brioc arrived at the little river town (which had now been named Afondun), halfway through January. With close to two thousand men and women available for building, the walls had been completed and armed with their ballista within four weeks. Prefabricated, buildings had quickly produced a neatly laid out town to the north of the fort with a bath house, council house and ceilidh houses. A small town praesidium with an office staff of four was now planning two markets for each month. Afondun was far from being completed, but all the old huts had been cleared away and the whole civil population was decently housed only two weeks after the fort was ready. Hence the arrival of Brioc. The ceremony of officially naming the town and placing it under the patronage of the God that the Parisi favoured was set for the last day of January and Imbolc.

Amaethon seemed particularly appropriate as the God of Afondun. A male God of agriculture he not only fostered crops and livestock breeding, but was a vigorous defender of the field and woodland. Lugh, of course, ruled overall in Camelod.

Brioc was accompanied by a couple of bardoi and a small group of students. He had come from Clarbre with them. There were two of the larger buildings completed now, his own house with bath house - and a college with living quarters for ten students. So far he was the only druid in residence, but things were changing in Britain. Apart from the growth of Camelod at the centre, the increasing contact of Rome with its' clients had fostered a move against the druids by kings and nobles who were more afraid of Rome than respectful of the learning and divining of the druids. The movement was in its early phase as yet, but effects could already be seen in the movement of druids away from those areas where it was becoming uncomfortable to practice their medicine or deliver legal judgements. Brioc had already adjusted the original building plan at Clarbre in anticipation of a larger residency.

Chapter Twelve

April AD42 on the Ouse

The last month of almost solid rain had raised the river level considerably and increased the speed of the water - on occasions the normal reversal of flow when the tide rose had not occurred at all. No message was received from the other expedition until halfway through March. It was clear from that that the eastern part of the expedition would not march until the rain stopped, the ground they had to cover tended to be marshy at the best of times, it was more like a shallow lake at the moment. However the rain had been nothing more than a drizzle for five days and the run-off from the highlands on either side of the Ouse valley had lessened greatly. It could have been worse, there had been times when heavy rain had followed a period of hard frost in the highlands and the surge along the river had been enough to break the banks for dozens of miles. That anecdote had alarmed Lucius, they had not suffered massive flooding this year, but it would clearly be a threat. He set up a separate team of engineers to survey the river bank and the fields immediately surrounding the town (allowing for the growth expected in the next five years), and then instituted a programme of building to place earthworks around the town, raising the banks to close with the earthworks and to install a slanting breakwater or groin to protect the expanding docks from tree trunks swept down in the floods. It was a long term programme, there were too many other tasks for the engineers to make that a priority. Even if they were unfortunate in the weather it was extremely unlikely that a hard frost and heavy rainfall could be experienced before next winter. The river could cope with heavy rain that fell on soft ground.

Ten armoured boats were loading at the quayside. The additional two boats had been produced under covered boatyards in Windubro, where there was an abundance of waterpower for cutting the timber, and they had arrived just two days ago. Two teams of surveyors with a century of infantry, had already been despatched to trace out a pathway paralleling the river and clear it for cavalry and wagons. Messengers from the eastern force had arrived three weeks ago and it was planned that the two forces would meet at the next river settlement. Matters were well in hand.

Lucius had no doubts about taking the settlement with the troops already on hand (the Brigante were reported to have retreated to the next settlement upriver from there), but it made a useful rendezvous. Although the readying of the boats did not really need his supervision, he watched the process closely - it had occurred to him that, in this land of slow rivers, a lighter boat of the same length and still carrying a century of infantry and a ballista would cover distances faster than a century on foot. They would not need to carry the load carried now, just the legionaries, their weapons, spare pila, food for five days. The ballista would travel in the prow, in fact - with a rare flash of inspiration - Lucius saw them

as double ended boats, able to proceed in either direction just by shifting the rowers, and steering on the oars alone - no steering oar. That way the ballista could be used to fire astern if they needed to retreat - and with Heron's fire pots it would be a fearsomely effective weapon. The waterslide at Cantodunon was being built to facilitate the transfer of goods from river barges to sea going ships, taking the barges around the dam and under the bridge, but it would also allow the assault boats to travel up the Trent as far as Windubro. There was no slide as yet, but with one in place, a force of infantry could travel from the upper waters of the Ouse or Wharfe to the Severn road a distance of about one hundred and eighty miles. How long would that take?

The men had already exercised in these boats, heavy as they were, and it was on that experience that he knew the boats travelled faster than marching pace., but how much faster? They had not been built for speed, that was a bonus and rivers did not run straight like a road. How much faster? He stood and stared at them unaware for some moments that Dungan was trying to attract his attention. Lucius stopped daydreaming long enough to get into the boat, settling himself on the padded chair in the stern that gave him a view over the heads of the men. An exposed position, but one easily exchanged for the shielded area at the foot of the chair. Watching the men take up positions - thirty two to the sixteen oars, fifty one taking up passenger places down the spine of the boat - he came to the conclusion that boat centuries ought to have a complement divisible by sixteen to make the changeover of crews more logical. And they must develop a drill so that men could change places without breaking the beat. How fast? Just before the order was given to set off, he called out to the shore.

"Hi there, I want a squad of men to march along the bank at forced pace when the lead boat - this one - starts rowing, for one thousand paces. Then the optio will take note of where we have got to, pace off the extra distance and send the information on by mounted messenger."

"The total distance Lord, or from our halt to the mark?"

"Good man!" Lucius always enjoyed a display of intelligence in the young men he had trained he felt it a compliment to his own skills. "What's your name and rank soldier?"

"Optio Ian, Lord."

"Right Optio; I want the total distance. Got that?"

"Yes Lord."

Making sure that the men on the bank were watching closely, Lucius gave the order to give way, "Top speed, lads. Let's see what you can do with this great lump of a beast, eh?"

There was a rumble of quiet laughter and the rowers leaned forwards, while the passengers pulled in their own elbows and made sure that neither they or their equipment would get in the way.

"Ready! Give Wa.a.a.ay!" And he felt himself pressed back in the chair. It was not a startling acceleration, much the same as when you kneed a horse to the fast walk, but it was acceleration and the pressure remained there for a minute or so. On shore the squad of legionaries had taken the lead for twenty paces or so, then the boat began to catch up and by Lucius's guess, they caught up at around the five hundred pace mark. Two thousand feet, for a pace was right boot to right boot and just over four feet long. He turned his head to watch the squad slowly fall away behind them and was highly satisfied when they halted.

"Keep it up. Keep it up. Let me see how far you can manage this speed." It was unfair, for the men had exercised, but certainly had not acquired the calluses on their hands or the trained muscles to withstand the vigorous movements. Nevertheless, they managed five or six miles up the Ouse before their condition became plain to Lucius.

"Thanks, men. We've just learned something very valuable. Change over oarsmen. And for Lugh's sake be careful! How many of you can swim? NO! I don't want to know **now**. Sit down again."

Half the men had started to their feet to answer him in a proper fashion and the boat rocked alarmingly. Lucius made a note to devise a whole rationale of procedures and commands for boat work, otherwise, he acknowledged to himself, it would be a shortlived force. The second set of oarsmen were kept to the same speed for perhaps half the distance - if all the men had blisters, there would be little progress tomorrow. At the end of the second shift, Lucius ordered them into the bank and waited for the horseman to catch up. It was a useful place to set up a camp anyway, a clean, sandy shelving beach long enough for all ten boats to drive their prows onto and a four foot high bank which promised dry ground to lie on. The weather was dull, but there was no rain - a rare blessing after March's experience.

Celtic Empire - Camelod

The marching camp (if it could be called that when boats were used), was much smaller than usual for a ten century force because there was room aboard to sleep half the men in comfort. A ditch and palisade - pointed posts with willow woven through - paralleled the bank for sixty yards, two more of twenty yards joined the ends to the bank; eight hundred men made short work of that and then Lucius ordered 'make and mend', although there was precious little of that to do, and gave permission for three hunting parties. The bulk of the men, spent the time at leisure, wandering around the camp - about twenty needed salves for their blisters and then sewed 'palms' to take the punishment next day. It was a practice only indulged in when absolutely necessary, hard hands were more useful and reliable on the oars than padded ones.

The messenger arrived just as the ditch digging was coming to an end.

"Greetings, Lord."

Lucius was in the large tent that served as Principia on the march, sitting on a folding chair and writing on the top of a trunk that held his personal belongings and portable office. "Ah yes. Well have you got the distances noted?"

"Yes, Lord." He fumbled in the wallet on his belt and handed over a wax tablet.

Lucius grinned at it and then up at the face of the messenger, "Four hundred paces. Hah!"

Calling through the open tent flaps he bellowed, "Dungan! Are you there?"

Dungan's face appeared around a flap almost immediately, "Of course, Lord."

"Four hundred more, Dungan. The boats rowed one thousand and four hundred paces while the squad trotted one thousand. That's almost nine miles every hourwith these heavy boats! With light assault craft and relays of oarsmen we could move a century at least ninety miles in a day! And two thirds of them ready to fight immediately. That's better than cavalry!" He turned back to the messenger with a broad smile, "Get yourself something to eat lad and then find yourself a bed for the night - we've plenty of space.

"Well, well. Ninety miles in a day. It's about twenty five miles from Cantodunon to Afondun, say a bit less than three hours."

"What about the tides and the bore, Lord?"

"I'd forgotten about that. We'll just have to learn to cope with them, Dungan. That's what a legionary does best. Cope."

The primus muttered what he thought the average legionary did best.

"I heard that Dungan!" Then the stern look dissolved in a grin, "You could be right though."

The expedition to the Derwent

April 42AD

"Is it always this exciting serving in the legion? I'd sooner watch grass grow." There was no doubt in anybody's mind that Kierha was bored - had been bored for several weeks now. Since the side trip to see what was happening at Brido - and discovering that nothing was happening there ...and probably would not happen - the Parisi had simply sat around the camp fires again. A desultory interest was taken in the antics of the Camelodian contingent as they exercised every day for three hours. Mostly without horses, the weather was too bad to subject them to more than an unladen walk every morning and afternoon - every day, that is, when the weather was not desperately awful. Legionaries went out for their stint in any state of the weather that allowed them to see where they were going. One joker put in for transfer to the horse lines - and won himself an additional five days of latrine duty.

A signal post had been set up on high ground where there was a view of the jetty at Brido on the one hand and the fort on the other. Another had been built to close the gap between the fort and the last post built on their way up the Derwent valley. Otherwise nothing was done except the continuous plugging of roof leaks and maintenance of the camp roads. Kierha made her complaint loudly, even by her standards - and five hours later the rain stopped and the sun came out.

After a few days it was decided that the ground was draining off sufficiently to allow them to make the journey to the Ouse. The fortlet was left with a garrison of two centuries of cavalry and a couple of ballista, the remaining sixteen hundred men consisted of almost equal numbers of Parisi and Camelodian horsemen and fourteen mobile ballistas. It was decided to divide them in two, one half to continue with the original plan, building signal posts from east to west and setting up fortlets at intervals of sixteen miles or so. The extension of the signal posts in this manner constructed a loop so that if the line was broken at one point, messages would still be received from the opposite direction around the loop. It was a handy system and arrived at purely by chance, but in future the system would expand by throwing out loops of this type and joining them.

Aiden was taking six centuries of cavalry, seven ballista and five hundred Parisi on the cross-country route to the Ouse, guided by the scouts from Afondon; Kierha and Gwillam led the second group of four hundred Parisi, three cavalry centuries and seven ballista - a force that would steadily be depleted as they left men in the signal posts and small garrisons in the fortlets. The Camelodian contingent was under the command of Bevan and would be largely responsible for supervising the engineering, building and road building. The figures were calculated to leave a force of one century of cavalry, one hundred Parisi and most of the ballista by the time they joined Lucius. As it turned out, the calculations were totally inadequate, recruit training became the prime occupation of the centuries and events proved their present numbers to be insufficient for the task that was presented.

The land around the Derwent was still flooded, a couple of feet deep in many places, but they found a fordable place where the river was running a little faster, wider and draining the land on either side and both parties crossed to the left bank. That exercise took all day and a temporary camp was set up in the late afternoon, rations were good, but consisted of pulses and grain, meat had disappeared when the local game had either been killed or left for quieter pastures. Evening around the campfires was not as cheerful as might have been expected at the outset of a journey, but morale was moderately good on the whole.

Aiden set off after the men had had breakfast, there were no wagons to hold them back and they headed off to the west south west at a reasonable pace, splashing through rivulets and temporary swamps, keeping to the driest ground in the wake of their guides. Two days later they rode into the second river port Which was placed at the confluence with the Wharfe and only ten river miles from Afondon. It had been deserted when Lucius arrived and seemed to have been so for several weeks. All the houses were wrecked, dead animals had been flung into the three wells - not an effective means of depriving the centuries of water, the water table was about six feet for most of the area. Lucius had the animals hauled out and dumped in the river, the old wells were filled in with lime and earth and new ones dug well away from them. By the time that Aiden arrived, a small town had grown up with a new jetty and warehouses, inhabited by an armed force of about two thousand armed men and at least fifteen hundred civilians - they called it Trefod.

The remaining part of the eastern expedition swung slightly north onto low hills and then headed due west along the left bank of the Derwent, building a road from the ford. It was not a good fording place (because of the flooding the land beyond had not been scouted either), and the road to the east and Brido could wait until it was decided to develop the deserted settlement and a bridge was built. Road building along the Derwent was a slow

process, there were the usual multiplicity of small tributaries - not serious barriers in themselves, but they cut deep defiles that had to be crossed, usually by the expedient of making a culvert and filling in above it, quicker than bridge building, but when there were two or three to the mile - very tedious. The Parisi had no skills at road building; although the legion was able to make use of half of them (who were not of the warrior or merchant class), at simple labouring jobs, the grading and road laying was a skilled job and the centuries took care of that.

Gwillam and Kierha soon discovered that this land was more heavily populated than the low-lying ground they had covered when they had marched from Beturos. Within seven miles of the start of the road the scouts reported a large settlement spread around a hill topped with old earthworks. The two Parisi commanders and Bevan who now commanded the Camelodians went forward to see for themselves. It was fairly neatly organised with a ditch and palisade, but the houses were the usual British round houses with low walls and heavy thatch. They lay scattered over an area of about twenty acres and a quick count established about three hundred of them, with an uncounted number of what could politely be called bothies, in a dense clump on the northern side.

Two centuries and two hundred or so Parisi were engaged in road building two miles to the rear and the remaining cavalry and the seven ballista would not make as impressive a sight as the whole 'army'. It was decided that road building would stop for the time being so that the centuries could reassemble in full armour and the Parisi could don their own battle finery from the baggage animals. The whole column, with the cavalry in the lead, would then march up to the town. However, road building is a dirty business and it was a full hour before the column was assembled to Bevan's satisfaction, but a few minutes more took the gleaming column around the shoulder of the hill, with armour gleaming, lances held upright and standards fluttering. The centuries trotted in line up to the entrance to the town, it was a hurdle drawn across a gap in the palisade, and then deployed in ranks four deep on either side. The Parisi drew up rather untidily behind the ranks, but they were impressive too in a less disciplined fashion. Gwillam, Kierha and Bevan trotted to the fore and a cornet sounded. It was an unmistakable summons for a meeting with the chief men of the town. Everybody waited - although the hurdle was so flimsy that it would have collapsed if the three horses had scratched themselves on it.

That morning Rowena had risen as usual, shortly before daybreak, to attend to her duties. She was the daughter of a noble, one of twenty such in Derwenta, but that did not mean she could avoid the responsibility of seeing that the servants set about their tasks

properly. The goats had to be well brushed before milking to avoid the hair tainting the milk and a fine net stretched across the milking jar for the same reason; the banking must be removed from the fires carefully and fuel properly chosen to avoid smoke while the draught had no power to it; maids were directed to the other huts in her father's little compound, to clean away food from last night and prepare breakfast for the menfolk; she, herself, was expected to look as a chieftain's eldest daughter should, with an immaculate tunic and skirt and her long fair hair freshly braided and coiled on top - and there was no maid available to help **her** toilette. It was a day like any other. Nothing to mark it from the rather boring round of days.

So it continued until close on midday when a sudden hubbub from the river gate, caught her attention. Wandering over to the gateway of their compound she looked through an irregular gap in the houses, to the river gate - so called because it overlooked the Derwent about a mile away - people were jostling in a crowd there and more were joining the throng all the time. Nobody appeared to be going out of the gate and so the crowd of men, women and children simply grew larger, by the minute. She cocked her head suddenly, above the noise of the crowd she had heard a horn or some sort of musical instrument - it was diminished both by the noise and because it appeared to come from outside the wall.

Rowena looked over her shoulder at the houses, nobody else seemed to be paying attention, indeed she was the only person visible in the compound. She was tempted; there was something important - or at least, exciting - going on at the gate. Would she be missed ? She was not actually forbidden to leave the compound, she often managed to see Saith without anyone knowing, but she was unwilling to risk her trysts with him, by a visit to the river gate that her father might so easily discover. Trysts were carefully planned, times chosen, and so far had passed unnoticed. Her thoughts distracted her attention from the gate and she smiled to herself. Saith was a handsome youth, seventh son of a potter - a potter who was much prized by her father, Renfrew. Renfrew did not own Saith or his family, but he owned their house, their household goods, the workshop that they made pots in - and the labourers who trod or puddled the clay. It would take a fine definition to class Saith and his family as freemen.

A quick grimace, displayed her distaste for the situation and she shrugged. There was no question, but that he loved her as much as she loved him, butone had to be practical. There was not the slightest chance of her father allowing marriage and if she was to allow their love to take its natural course, she would be punished in a particularly gruesome manner that she would rather not think about. Saith would suffer in much the same manner. For a moment or two a cruel little demon deep inside wondered what that would feel like to him, and then she thrust it away in absolute horror that she could think it

for even a moment. The outcome would be the same - it would take longer for Saith, of course (that little demon again) - they would both be dead. Very romantic, just like the songs the bardoi sang when father entertained - but she wanted no part of it. Better disappointed love than a highly public death.

The noise came to a finish quite quickly and she peered through the houses again. Renfrew was there now with four or five other nobles and the crowd was opening up to leave a path to the gate. There was no question now of going down to the gate - far too risky!

The potteries were housed in a series of leantoos running alongside a stream on the west of the town. On the other side of the stream a series of paths led from puddling pits to the source of the marl - a hole scooped from the base of the hill half a mile away, and a constant traffic of men with hods of raw clay on their shoulders coursed back and forth. Empty hods west, full ones to be dumped in the pits coming back to the town. The palisade here was non-existent, trampled down over the years in the interests of the potters. It was a testament to the lack of warfare in the area. Renfrew's potteries consisted of nineteen of the leantoos, Saith's family worked in five of them, one potter to each. Each man had his own wheel, a rotating table set in a support, with a large kickwheel at the other end of the shaft at floor level. Another stand or table stood at the side with blocks of puddled clay with all the air trodden out of it and covered in damp cloths. The potters worked well, but without any great interest in working fast - why should they? They only had to satisfy the workmaster that they were actually working, excess industry was tiring, it was bothersome to the workmaster who was also expected to keep a tally of the items produced and organise their despatch to drying shelves and from there to the kilns.

One hundred pots a day was all he felt capable of dealing with, twenty pots per wheel - quite enough for the benefit of a hut of his own and a joint of mutton every week in addition to the pease, grain and barley beer that formed the greater part of his wage. The work looked hard, as the men kicked at the wheels beneath the tables, keeping a flow of water on the rotating clay with swift scoops of one hand as the other continued to control the form already developed., but all of them had been doing it since boyhood, there was a rythmn to it, even in summer they barely raised a sweat., but it was boring.

Saith was bored, but he expected to be bored it was the common state of life in the town. He worked from an hour after dawn to an hour before sundown during the hours of good light, occasionally he was given permission to leave the town to fish or hunt the small amount of game that was available within half an hour of Derwenta. Just as occasionally

he managed to leave the town after dark, along one of the convenient paths that the labourers used, and meet with Rowena. Stolen minutes, but not really dangerous unless someone had reason to suspect what was happening.

He was a tall youth, sixteen years old with the barest of whiskers on his fresh round face, and black curly locks that, more often than not, were caked with red clay. A cheerful lad, well liked and industrious - within the limits of what his father and the workmaster expected of him.

A voice called to him from the doorway to the path on the town side of the pottery.

"Ho, there's strangers down at the gate. Are you coming?"

Coming? Certainly he was coming. Saith looked around at his companions - they were already stopping their wheels and covering them with the damp cloths that lent such a distinctive smell to the place. He joined them and they joined the crowds that were flowing towards the river gate. He would be passing Renfrew's compound. Would he catch a glimpse of Rowena? Make a signal perhaps?

He did see Rowena, she was standing by the compound gate staring down towards the river gate, tall, buxom and too interested in the town gate at that moment to notice him. A slight frown of concentration on her long oval features, it creased her brow and added two or three years to her fifteen. He took the time to steal a long look and then chased on after the others before it could attract undue attention. After all many men looked long at Renfrew's daughter, fair hair like hers was not common and there was a general acknowledgement that she was a rare beauty. Breathless he stopped at the back of the crowd, taller than most he could look clear over the top of most heads; what he saw took his breath away.

Ranks of tall armoured men on fine horses, each animal curried until the coat shone. The men though! That was what took his eye most. Clad in segmenta lorella and kilts armoured with strips of steel, they shone in the morning sunlight, the strips of the segmenta curved around broad chests and were complemented by strips curving over the shoulders. Each man wore a helmet with a brow ridge and cheek guard, there were grieves on their legs, swords at their sides and an eight foot lance standing upright in a socket that hung from the saddle. Every piece of metal had been freshly sanded and it gleamed and scintillated wondrously. Within a few heartbeats Saith realised something that had never struck him before. Being bored was not a necessary part of life. All at once he knew that he could not bear to work in the pottery for the rest of his life. It was a new thought! He had never had reason to consider the matter before, the pottery was there,

his father worked there, he worked there, doubtless his sons would work there and, sooner or later he would die - in the pottery like as not!

These men though, sitting still and upright on their horses with only the occasional impatient stamping of a hoof to disturb the paradethese men. ...Well, they wouldn't waste their time in a pottery that was for sure! All at once he was scheming to talk to one of them, to find out how he could join them, ride a fine horse and wear armour! The answer came his way very shortly - and then there was another question - and that concerned Rowena.

PROPERTY OF MERTHYR TYDFIL
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Chapter Thirteen

Three Parisi who were Camelodian citizens, and the centurions, met with the nobles of Derwenta. Kierha as commander of the joint force and a citizen, headed the group of six and greeted the Derwenta nobles who walked, somewhat hesitantly, through the gate of the town.

"Greetings, nobles of Derwenta."

"Our greetings to you too, Lady." The speaker was a middle aged man, stout, bald headed and with a prominent chin that had once been pugnacious, but was now so cushioned in rolls of fat that his whole face was a wedge of flesh resting on his chest. "My name is Bleddon. I am chief of our town. We .." A plump hand indicated the other seven men. "... wish to know what you and your splendid warriors, intend towards us. This has a very warlike appearance and we are a peaceful people."

"Lord Bleddon, we appear warlike because this is a small part of the army of Camelod and we intend to frustrate an attack by the Brigante against these lands that border our own."

"An attack!" The noble turned to his companions in consternation. "An attack?, but we have heard of no attackshave we?" His fellow nobles looked equally stunned by the news. None of them appeared to be of warrior class, amply well-fed, ranging in age from about thirty five to sixty, and in weight from two hundred pounds upwards. 'Peaceful' was not the word that came into Kierha's mind, but 'Sluggish'. She explained patiently.

"The Brigante do not announce their attacks, Lord Bleddon." He nodded in acceptance and she gestured for Bevan to step forward.

"Tell Lord Bleddon what happened on the Ouse, primus."

"Yes Lady." Bevan stood stiffly with his left hand resting on the hilt of his cavalry sword, being addressed as 'primus' was a supreme pleasure, it was only a temporary title, but to be savoured all the more. He delivered his report in a stilted fashion, the headman was not a prepossessing type, but despite that he was a man of rank, "The Brigante took the riverports on the Ouse down as far as Afondon. We attacked and defeated them there, taking slaves and booty. An attack is now being launched upriver by Lord Lucius and an army of two thousand."

"Afondon?, but that is miles from here."

Kierha grinned unpleasantly, "Forty miles to be exact and Afondon was over eighty miles from Brigante country. They're not averse to a bit of walking you know." Leaning forward she placed a forefinger on the spongy flesh of his chest, "The point is that we, Camelod, do not intend to sit on our backsides while the Brigante rampage all over the land between the Ouse and the sea."

"Oh no! We can quite understand that." A murmur of agreement echoed his words, "But how does this affect us. Surely you will take your army over towards the Brigante country?"

"Brigante country, Bleddon? Tell me where does that start or finish? On the Ouse? What is the ancestry of your own people, eh?"

"Well! I myself, am a Parisi ...well mostly, I suppose."

"Bleddon, your people are a mixture of Parisi, Carveti and Brigante - and the Carveti are virtually Brigante - at least first cousins to them. No, like it or not, Brigante country stretches in a vague way at least as far as the Derwent and they are intent upon making it a more definite situation. They were carrying out that policy on the Ouse and now that they are rebuffed they will head east to outflank Camelod and our friends Beturos. They will head here."

"But what shall we do? We have no warriors, no men of war." He was visibly trembling at the thought.

Kierha put her hand on his shoulder, hiding a grimace of distaste as she felt the flabbiness beneath the splendid cloak, "We are here now and there is much that we, Camelod and Derwenta, can do together."

"Together?" Bleddon's fears changed direction again, from consideration of the absent Brigante to the clearly present Camelodians, Kierha quickly sought to soothe him.

"Yes. We need to confer together and such things are best done indoors, with a fire, food and wine suitable for allies. Have you a council house?"

"Well yes, .. A large house that we use for meetings."

Celtic Empire - Camelod

"We will go there then." She stepped back briskly, "We need to form an encampment for the troops and we would like to buy some cattle and sheep from you for our provisions."

"Buy?"

"Certainly, did you think we would steal from men who are most probably going to be close friends of Camelod." She laughed loudly, dismissing the thought completely with an extravagant gesture, "No, no we have silver to exchange for livestock and will be happy to have our quartermaster meet with your man so that he can select what is needed."

Bleddon's eyes were rounded, his pupils wide - as if he had suddenly met a well loved member of his family, "Silver!"

"Indeed yes, good Gaulish silver - we do not mint our own coins as yet, but we will do...., but come, take us to this hall of yours so that we can carry our discussions forward."

The troops were dismissed and sent off to make an encampment to the east of the town, the nobles and the Camelodian leaders marched off amicably through the gate and the crowd that was still gawping there, and shortly afterwards sheep and bullocks were being driven towards the camp boundary ditches - the first measure taken in building any camp.

Immediately after a little speech, welcoming the Camelodians to the council house, it was obvious that there was something very particular troubling Bleddon's mind - and those of his fellow nobles too and after wandering about before the fire at the centre of the building he suddenly stopped and asked nervously, "Lady, forgive me, but how long do you intend to stay here?"

It took her by surprise, the man did not look to have the balls to question what they did - clearly something was very wrong for him to come out with it like that. Judging from the intent way in which his fellows awaited her answer the problem affected all of the town.

"We had thought to spend some time here, there is much to do - a fort, signal stations to south and west, surveying a road. Don't worry; we will pay for all the food our men consume."

He leant forward, having just been given his cue, "Ah, yes., but you see that is the problem - we do not have flocks and herds enough to support ourselves if you stay for more than ..."

Bleddon cast about his nobles to see if they had any accurate answer, but they clearly had not had time to carry out an investigation, and he went on, hesitantly, "..... possibly ten days - maybe less."

This was astounding, livestock rearing seemed to be the only major industry apart from the potteries - and yet they were short of animals? "Has there been sickness, then?"

"Sickness?" Her remark seemed to amuse him in a bitter fashion. "You might call it that, yes indeed." He drew a deep breath as if to explain and then decided that someone else should bear the burden. Bleddon turned to the man at his side, a burly, comfortable looking man with long white hair tied into a bunch at the back of his neck. He was probably the youngest there, but was not the least intimidated by either the older noble or the Camelodians. Bleddon said, "Ewan?" And he took a long pace forward to stand at the centre of the group.

"A plague it was, of a sort. Sea thieves - pirates ... and our own stupidity. Oh, yes!" He asserted at the little outburst of protest, "we were stupid and greedy..... Let us be seated, it's a long tale and one I'd rather deliver sitting down."

After a minute or two as they dragged seats, and sawn logs into a half circle, he began his story. "It was two years ago and some months. September. One day a stranger rode down into the town from the east. Now, see ...that was strange because there's nought to the east except the high land and the coast." He caught the stir amongst the Camelodians and forestalled them, "You are going to ask about the settlement there, eh? Well it was ours. Still is, I suppose if we could bear to look at it. He was a well dressed man, tall, dark of features, deepset black eyes, a great beak of a nose and long black curls. We welcomed him, he sat here in this hall and we gave him food and drink and waited for him to give us news of the outside world. (We don't have many visitors, the boatmen on the Derwent, the odd trader from along the old tracks with a train of packhorses. That's all).

"He enquired after our health, praised our flocks, which at that time spread all over the hillsides for a mile perhaps. 'Where did we sell them?' He asked. Well we ate a good half of them ourselves, but the others went in dribs and drabs to traders who visited us in October. We told him. 'Ah,; he said - and I can remember him clearly now, how he stood with one hand raised as if he was about to bestow a blessing on the house. A blessing! 'I can help you there, friends. I am a shipowner seeking provisions for the Roman army

in Lower Germania, with three ships to fill, next year. I will buy two thousand head from you then, if we can agree a price.' He was offering coin, not grain, wine or metalware in exchange, but silver coin - and he had a pound or two right there at his belt. He showed it to us, pouring it from one hand to the other and chuckling. Well the party got quite cheerful after that, I can tell you."

Ewan moistened his mouth with a moderate draught from his cup, he coughed and went on, "Well we hadn't got that many sheep, nor would have by the next year, but we reckoned we could have about half that number ready for him. 'How are you going to pick them up we said?'

'Ah yes,' he said," Ewan wagged his head in illustration, "'There isn't a jetty to load at, is there?' And then some idiot said, 'We could build one, though.' Renfrew didn't like that, did you Renfrew? He wasn't firm enough though." A melancholic sniff interrupted the narrative, and then he continued. "We all agreed that it was a good idea, but a lot of work, still there's nothing much to do in the winter and so we decided to build a settlement there for the men who would build the jetty, and settle some sheep there with a shepherd or two and see what we could manage for the next year, June he said.

"Well he went off the next morning and we sent three hundred and fifty men to build huts for themselves first of all and then cut timbers for the jetty." The Camelodians were nodding to themselves, they had seen where this was all heading as soon as he mentioned three ships, but were too polite to break the thread of his story.

"Come June and we had half a jetty built and when the stranger arrived - he was called Azael or something like that - there were twelve hundred sheep waiting. 'Ah, that's a bit of a disappointment,' looking at the length of the jetty. 'we can only load one ship at a time. Still there's only just over a shipload anyway, let's get them all on board.' " Ewan groaned at the memory, "Two days it took and it was hot. Boyo, it was that hot the wool was falling off the sheep's backs by the bucketful and it drifted about. Have you ever eaten raw wool? For two days?

"At the end he came up to us with a little lad at his side and a sad look on his face. 'Do you see that boat there?' Pointing way beyond the ships to a small rowboat with four men rowing like fury. 'They've run off with my silver and I cannot pay you now.' There were some angry words said, let me tell you. Bleddon there looks soft, but he has a fine turn of phrase when it's needed. 'No, no' says Azrael, don't you worry, I will leave my eldest son with you as a hostage and when I come next year I'll have all the silver - Chained down this time' and he laughed. 'And the jetty will be finished and I'll take all the sheep you can manage - and my beloved son.' Ewan shrugged his shoulders.

"He was such a likeable man ... And he was leaving his son as surety, so we said 'Yes' and that was that."

Bevan broke into this natural break in the monologue, "He came back didn't he."

"Oh yes! The devil came back with five ships this time - and he gave us three sacks of silver, and we gave him his son and we spent the next three days loading sheep. I had to go back to Derwenta when they were just starting on the last ship and I was at the top of the hill when I heard shouting and yelling down by the jetty. When I turned Azrael's men had surrounded our men and bound most of them before the rest realized what was happening, just three men escaped. The rest were loaded into two of the ships and sailed off. For some reason three stayed for that night and left next morning." His head drooped at the memory, but there was still the finish, "Apart from three thousand sheep, they took three hundred and fifty healthy men to sell as slaves and they kept their cursed silver, of course." It was done and a sympathetic silence acknowledged the terrible event.

Kierha said, "North African slavers?"

"We think so. They were all dark men, some of them black with tight, curly hair."

Gwillam told the councillors of the report of three ships seen at Brido last year, "Your slavers obviously. Lady Kierha here inspected Brido and the new jetty a month ago, but could make no sense of it or the settlement built there. Now we know."

There was silence for a few minutes, the tragedy loomed over all their thought and had changed the direction of Kierha's strategy completely. The whole point of this expedition was to add to Camelod's lands and population by the easiest and least expensive method possible. This situation presented a much better approach than had been evident earlier. Previously, the thorny question of persuading the nobles that their interests would be best served by becoming citizens of Camelod, had only the levers of possible increased industry, and the simple fact that a new, nearby Camelodian town paying its citizens for all work, would bleed labour away from Derwenta. Now there was a much stronger pair of levers. She allowed a decent amount of time to elapse and then proceeded to apply leverage.

"Nobles. You realise that we are representatives of a new power in the land - and that we are seeking to widen our influence and power. The Brigantes are a threat to our trade and we have only one response to threats of that kind - we eliminate them.

"Outside this hall you have seen a tiny portion of our army. Tomorrow, if it pleases you, we will demonstrate its' power, but that may be taken to be a threat against yourselves - an implied threat, but a threat nevertheless, and we are not in the habit of threatening those we would make friends of." Kierha placed her hands on her knees and leaned forward, delivering a fulsome smile to the half circle of faces before her. She shook her head, "Na, na. We show our friends the advantages of becoming citizens and the strength of commerce and military might that would result. See. A Camelodian fort on the hillside facing the sea, garrisoned by two centuries of cavalry and one of infantry, would prevent any future raids." Breaking off, she looked sternly at her audience, "They'll be back you know. Not with a ruse, as last time, but with warriors to attack the town and make a harvest of slaves and cattle. I know of these North Africans, they used to operate in the Middle Sea, but Rome made war on them and broke their power there. Now they operate around the fringes of the empire, just out of reach of the Roman navy. Yes, they'll be back now that they know there is a good resource of men and meat here.

"So becoming citizens would give this town protection against slaving and other marauders." One hand was lifted in admonition as she applied the second lever, "But that is a negative matter, a mere preventative against things becoming worse than they are at present. There is a positive side to citizenship where your situation becomes very much better than at present. You have built a jetty, yes? We have seen it. Well built and in good condition, but there is little shelter for shipping, no harbour, no breakwater and I would say that when the wind comes from the east it would be a positively dangerous shore. Am I right?"

Bleddon shook his head, "I really don't know; I'm no merchant." and the tone of his denial stiffened Kierha's hackles. Still she managed to continue with nothing of her anger showing in her voice, "Well then, take my word that it is so. Now, we can show you how to improve matters. We have engineers in Cantodunon who can supervise your labour and produce all that is needed to make a safe harbour in Brido. Small, but safe. What does a harbour mean to Derwenta? Azael spoke truly in one thing at least, there is a good trade to be had with Lower Germania and Gaul for meat and grain - and pottery - and a number of other industries that we can introduce you to.

"At the moment your only trade route is through the rivermen and I know that they charge a high premium for their services - I doubt that you get a quarter of the value of your livestock and pots from them. Yes?" They all nodded.

"Well then. There will be a port built at Brido - a small one. If we build it, we will be happy to ship your goods out - I have ships of my own and good markets on the other side of the channel."

Ewan exclaimed in surprise, "A warrior noble and a merchant?"

"And a woman, boyo." With an aggressive lift of her bosom. It was a challenge and Ewan sensibly let it pass.

"Yes, I'm a merchant and if Camelod builds the port we will charge you for its' use. You'll get a better deal than you do from the rivermen, but you'll still pay through the nose. Apart from the little port, Camelod will build watermills and with them make more pots in a day than you can, and grind barley, wheat and oats cheaper than you can - and carry on industries that you haven't thought of yet. This is a good place to build a new town, it will be on the new road from Brido to the Ouse, it has plenty of watercourses suitable for the waterwheels - Eh?"

Bleddon was attempting to say something, "What is a waterwheel?"

"Ah! Of course, you've never seen one. It is a huge wheel turned by the power of water and it can raise hammers for forging metal, stamps for pottery platters, bellows for the furnaces, turn millstones, operate fulling paddles and probably a lot of other things that are outside my expertise. Believe me Bleddon one waterwheel is worth a hundred men and more - and it doesn't need feeding or clothing.

"So when we build a new town, it will either be an extension of this one with your people as citizens or it will be Camelodian. Tell me Bleddon what keeps your people here? They are fed, housed and clad very little better than slaves ...so why do they stay? The town wall's no encumbrance, you have no armed force to keep them captive. Is it gratitude? A feeling of loyalty to you and the other nobles? Is it perhaps, that there is nowhere close by to go to? Like most humans they are lazy and would rather put up with bad conditions rather than go to the trouble of walking twenty miles to another employer."

She waited until he could bear the silence no longer and mumbled, "I would think it is because they're lazy."

"Of course, And what will happen when it is only a walk of two miles to another town, one with decent housing for its citizen, good rations, clothing allowance and wages?" What happens then?"

"Wages!"

"Wages."

"But how can you afford to pay them? I we get very little for the goods that they produce - and the sheep ...well!"

This man was really naive, Kierha thought and the expressions of her companions confirmed it, " Suppose your man makes ten pots in a day and you get five sesterces each for them after the rivermen take their cut. Now suppose that you decide to pay your man one sesterce for each pot?"

"One sesterce!"

She nodded firmly, "Yes. Quite suddenly you will find that he is making fifteen or sixteen a day you are getting twenty five or thirty sesterces more every day and you pay out fifteen or sixteen to get that sum. An additional profit of ten or eleven a day."

He sat up in outrage, "What! Only ten or eleven! I won't do it! I won't!"

She eyed him closely, had the man got a well hidden sense of humour, after all? But no, all he had was an immense burden of stupidity. Kierha sighed. "That is ten or eleven sesterces that you would not have otherwise. You pay fifteen and you get twenty five in return. On top of which as a citizen you have access to the new port and shipping and receive twice as much for each pot."

"Couldn't I make it half a sesterce a pot?"

"What! You miserable spalpeen! You byblow of an ancient donkey and a polecat! I'm explaining how you can improve your earnings and all you can do is blether about paying half a sesterce for each pot instead of one!" She stood up and the rest of the Camelodians stood too, "Is this the attitude of all of you? Eh?" Kierha in rage was formidable - terrifying and the nobles hastened to deny such mean spiritedness. They sat down again and continued explanations of what being a citizen entailed and the consequences of not being a citizen. Bleddon sulked through the whole proceedings. Despite his presence, the meeting became quite jolly; the prospects for the town if it was taken under Camelod's wing were good, the prospects if it was not ...were dire. With the certainty of losing trade

and population to the new town and the danger of marauders bypassing the fortress and pouncing on the soft target of Derwenta, left no sensible alternative.

The nobles would still be wealthy, the source of their wealth would simply be changed. At least two of them would become governor and deputy governor and receive salaries commensurate with the titles. The others would follow their present occupations either privately, investing their own money, or as stewards for town enterprises. Whatever path they followed they would be paid for their present property - but not for the men and women they ruled.

It was calculated that there were at least thirteen hundred youths between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who could be spared for service with the legion and Ewan opined that most of them would beg for the chance, after seeing the splendid turnout of the cavalry. When the watermills were installed either as community property or as private investment, there would be a surplus of labour, but then there would be new industry too and Cantodunon had a need for healthy labourers right now. It was a complex subject and one that could not be fully understood in an evening, but the nobles were confident in the goodwill of the Camelodians and happily confident that they would earn more in the new conditions than they did at the moment.

They went to their beds well past midnight. Kierha was almost last to leave and as she stepped into the darkness a figure leapt out at her from the side - and finished flat on his back with her boot on his throat. "What the hell are you playing at sonny?"

The noises coming from the man made it clear that although he would like to speak, he found it impossible, the boot lifted slightly, "Well?" He had made no obviously offensive move since jumping out so suddenly at her.

"Forgive me, Lady. I have been waiting to ask a favour and I was too impatient."

"You certainly were, boy. You're fortunate I came unarmed, otherwise we wouldn't be holding this conversation. Come on, now, get to your feet. What was it you wanted?"

Saith got to his feet, surrounded by the rest of the Camelodians and after massaging his throat, said, "I wish to become a citizen, Lady. A cavalry man, if you please."

Bevan laughed, "How old are you, lad?"

"Sixteen."

"You address me as 'primus'," Bevan snapped, "Sixteen? Well that's a reasonable age to join the legion. Why couldn't it wait until morning, eh? We'll be recruiting tomorrow - your nobles have just agreed to it."

"Oh!" The youth was crestfallen, his dramatic gesture had not only resulted in being flattened, and it had apparently been unnecessary. He hastened to excuse himself, "You see ...primus, ..and Lady. They say that a citizen of Camelod may wed who they like?" The intonation made it a question.

Kierha answered him, a little less brusquely than before, "You've got some poor girl with child then?"

He was horrified at the imputation, "No, Lady! No, but we're in love and she's the daughter of Renfrew - and I'm the son of one of his potters." Well that was clear enough, Kierha thought, she'd met Renfrew this evening. A decent sort of a man, but not likely to be in favour of his daughter linking herself with a potter.

"Well it's true enough, if the girl's fond of you ..."

"Lady! We're in love!"

She raised her eyes to the moonlit sky in resignation, "Yes lad, you're in love. Well you'd best get the details of recruit's pay and rights straight first. Camelod is generous, but only to citizens - and citizenship is only achieved after twelve months of satisfactory service, or acceptance as a trained legionary. Does the girl want to become a citizen too?"

The question startled him, Saith had not thought the situation through properly yet and there had been no chance to consult with Rowena. All that was evident in his face and Kierha laughed, "It's a good idea to get your girl's agreement first, before you wed her. What's your name anyway?"

"Saith, Lady."

"Well Saith, go away now and see one of the centurions in the morning about joining the legion. You look fit enough and the preliminary training will soon sort you out. Now go away."

"Yes, Lady - and thank you."

As he disappeared into the shadows of one of the lanes Kierha turned to Bevan, "If that's typical of the youth here, you are going to be sending most of your time training recruits. It **was** thirteen hundred young men that Bleddon claimed were suitable for recruiting? How are you going to arrange training that many, eh?"

"Oh we shall manage, Lady Kierha. I've got three optios as well as the other two centurions - and there are several of the men who have promise as junior officers. I'll give half the recruits jobs on road building while the other half start training in squads of forty, then after seven days or so, we switch over."

"Sounds reasonable. You know I've never seen how you go about training. I'll be interested to watch."

"You're very welcome, Lady."

"I'll be there when you make a start, but now I'm for bed." She looked at him with speculation in her eyes, Bevan was as tall as she was and very presentable, "I don't suppose that you would be interested in a little exercise before turning in?"

His jaw dropped and for a moment he looked almost panicstricken, "Forgive me, Lady. It's an honour, but I've not checked on the men yet and then we make an early start in the morning."

Her smile was almost motherly, there was still an overtone of lust, but .."That's all right Bevan. Some other time perhaps?"

"An honour Lady Kierha."

"Well don't let the honour worry you too much, I'm a simple woman - it's just your service I want. Now off you go, I'll sleep alone tonight."

Celebacy became almost a habit with her for the next, very busy, thirty days. Discussion with all Derwenta's nobles proceeded, the town was formally brought into Camelod's growing empire and the details of citizenship were explained, agreed and then the first stages implemented. Messages were sent to Cantodunon requesting more junior officers and engineers, and to Clarbreae to seek a blessing for the new town and to obtain Lugh's protection for both Derwenta and New Derwenta. New Derwenta grew slowly and the

huddle of shacks and bothies at the back of old Derwenta was gradually razed to the ground.

The first watermill was installed on the brisk stream that had served as the water supply for the shacks and very shortly the two nobles who had first become citizens, Renfrew and Gareth, had machines in their potteries that were stamping out patterned platters and shallow bowls - at five times the speed of plain platters and bowls 'thrown' on the wheels. After six days though, production came to a halt for lack of space in the firing kilns - and because there were more items than could be shipped by the rivermen. Most of the displaced potters became kilnmen, the rest found a ready source of employment in the building of New Derwenta.

Trefod June 42 AD

Lucius had reorganised his small army into three 'cohorts' and the artillery. The Parisi, recruited from the new citizens in Afondon, were employed in much the same manner as auxiliaries in the Roman army and formed one cohort of one hundred and fifty mounted men (all but fifty of the Beturon Parisi had returned to that town). Six hundred and forty infantry manned the boats, five hundred and sixty Camelodian cavalrymen and fifteen mobile ballistas formed the cohort marching along the left bank. The staff officers met each night on the bank as the two Camelodian forces kept pace with each other and the next day's march was planned.

Reports from the east were arriving almost every day now and the huge enterprise of building a new town by the Derwent had ruled out any possibility of receiving any more men from that expedition. It had also changed Lucius's view of what they should be achieving here on the Ouse. He felt confident in being able to sweep the Brigante off the river and also off its tributaries, with the Camelodian force alone. There were large numbers of the federated tribes ahead of them, but the battle at Afondon seemed to have destroyed any ambition for another pitched battle. Horsemen made a few raids, but these ceased very quickly, the Brigantean ponies were tough and ideally suited to hill country warfare, but were woefully slow on the low ground and the legion's cavalry operating in half squadrons were far too fast in defence or attack. The eight foot long lances with the crossbar just behind the small point was lethal when combined with the stirrups. The crossbar prevented the lance becoming trapped in the victim and allowed the point to tear out as the cavalryman stood up in his stirrups and rode over his quarry.

Three loose battles, or skirmishes, were fought against the Brigante raiders, six half squadrons acting independantly, but in support of each other, in very fluid actions. No more raids were made after that.

Lucius's campaign had changed its emphasis, with no organised opposition from Brigante he concentrated on making contact with the scattered settlements, sending out the Parisi warriors in bodies of fifty to find as many of the people who had fled the river and nearby villages as possible. They acted as armed ambassadors. Many of them were citizens of Camelod too and, after a series of signal exchanges with Cantodunon, each party was accompanied by a young druid or a bardoi. This did not please Brioc, the college at Clarbrae had been growing quite well, suddenly it was reduced to a quarter of its number, just a few days before the first day of May, Beltane. On the other hand, of course, his partly trained druids and bardoi would be acting as missionaries, spreading the idea of the new druidism with its chief God Lugh - and the minor Gods of choice for individual towns and settlements. Citizenship of Camelod and the new druidism went hand in hand. The growing worship of Lugh, as the God of State - similar to the position of Jupiter in the Roman Empire - gave a central importance to his priests. It had resulted in the first druid temple in Britain and demoted other Gods to merely local deities. Brioc, under the prodding of old Medoc, was busy constructing a creed - a systematic mode of worship - and a regular religious calendar. Placation of a large number of Gods, not worship, had been the main theme of religion in Britain until now. It was ironic that the influence of a Roman immigrant, Gregory, had led towards this strengthening of a religion that Rome considered a mortal enemy - and was doing it by adopting Roman ways.

After his first outbursts of noisy dissatisfaction at the temporary loss of his students, Brioc settled down and acknowledge that the advantages outweighed the annoyance. Twenty three students had their studies curtailed, with the promise that they would beginn again when other students had been found to take their places in the new lands.

Lucius's small army made a slow, steady progress along the Ouse, leaving exploration of the less navigable Wharfe for another time. Three small forts with room for a garrison of half a century and a troop of cavalry were built as part of the signal line at five to seven mile intervals. June was a delightful month on the river, there had been several rainy days but they had been moderate and the flow of water was sufficient to keep the river fully navigable without making it hard work, rowing upriver. The ten boats set off after each fortlet was finished and then unloaded precut timbers and other supplies at the next site chosen by the surveyors. On the ninth day of June the fleet had left the new fort of Isur a couple of miles behind and was rowing towards the site of the fourth fort. The Ouse had become the Ure for some reason only known to the locals and Isur was set at the

confluence of the Ure (running west), and the Swale flowing from the north. Considering that they had reached far enough to the north for the time being, Lucius directed the boats along the river Ure, roughly paralleling the Wharfe and intending to establish a road linking both when the foot of the central hill range was reached. Taken in conjunction with the road from Derwenta and the coast, this would establish a relatively short boundary with the main Brigante tribes and increase Camelod's rule by a rough rectangle thirty five miles from east to west, and thirty miles north to south. Over a thousand square miles traversed by navigable rivers, roads and looped signal lines.

He was busy with note book and stylus, establishing a sustainable establishment for the garrisons along the new border. At least that was the task he had begun, but the steady strokes of the oarsmen, the rippling of water along the sides of the boat and the flickering patterns of bright sunlight through the dense rows of alder and willow along each bank had a soporific effect. Lucius nodded in the stern of the rearmost boat, one hand in his belt, the other loosely gripping the wax note book that was slowly slipping between his knees. The boat shuddered as the oars were suddenly driven into the water to halt it, but it still closed up on the boats ahead, which were now backing water. Lucius jerked his head up and then stood to look forward the three hundred yards to the next bend. He counted the boats in sight rapidly, there were two more out of sight around that bend and the sounds of men shouting and screaming. There was no mistaking that sound, either the boats had attacked a force on the bank - which was most unlikely or, chillingly more likely, the head of the convoy had been ambushed.

"Into the bank, there." He pointed to his right, and took the time to replace the armour he had taken off in the warmth of the afternoon, by the time the bank was within his reach, Lucius was fully armed and a squad of cavalry were waiting for him with a spare horse ready saddled.

"What in Hades has happened?" He demanded as he scrambled into the saddle and started off upriver.

"Ambush, Lord. They sank the second boat in the line with a tree trunk dropped from above and then attacked the lead boat. The river is blocked, but Aiden has called up the mobile ballista." It was all disjointed and breathless, galloping pellmell along a river bank was not a smooth method of transport.

"Oh Lugh!" Breathed Lucius. it could have been worse, but not much, so far as the head of the convoy was concerned. When they arrived at the scene, there was a battle raging. The

second boat had sunk completely and, in all probability, the fully armoured men would be drowned, "Is it deep here?"

"Yes, Lord. They were getting some of the men out when we left to fetch you, but I don't think there would be many."

The wattle shields that had been provided against attack from the bank were raised on the first and third boats, but they would have taken casualties before they went up. Now that they were in place, they were an effective protection against spears, but a lot of damage had clearly been done. As the party drew to a halt twenty yards back from the bank, the river was only forty yards wide at this point, the first of the ballista galloped up and drew in beside them before slewing around and presenting the weapons to the other bank.

They opened fire at once with bags of cracked river stone, within a very short time six more arrived and followed their example. The Brigante on the other bank were well concealed and had wattle shields of their own, but they were totally useless against five pounds of stone at a range of less than seventy yards. Nothing much could be seen, but the hail of spears ceased almost immediately and the bursting bags must have been wreaking a vicious revenge judging from the noise. Under Aiden's direction, three of the ballista moved across the bend in the bank and bombarded the assailants of the third boat in the same fashion. The light weapons could discharge six times a minute when the men were fresh. After about ten minutes it seemed very likely that the enemy had retreated and Lucius called an end to the action. The fourth and fifth boats were used end to end as a bridge to transport a full century of infantry to the right bank, and the work of clearing up the mess began.

Camelod had lost sixty men, speared or drowned and almost as many wounded. Lucius cursed himself. In a foolish contradiction of not wanting to split his force and yet believing that there was little danger from the Brigante now, he had laid himself open to a very well planned ambush. If the ballista had not been able to cut down the unseen warriors, there might easily have been casualties on one or two of the other boats in the line. As it was he could only surmise that the size of the opposing force was small, otherwise they would have arranged other deadfalls along the length of the convoy and released them simultaneously. Camelod had come close to losing the whole of its river based force.

Hospital tents were constructed using the leather sheets of ordinary ones and casualties were accommodated in the shade. Only four medics accompanied the force, but the broad bladed Brigante spears either left wounds that could be stitched, or, where extraction was necessary, did so much damage that most of those casualties were either dead or dying.

There was little need for skilled surgery it was mostly a matter of first aid administered by comrades. Not all the dead were retrieved from the river, many must have been held down by the weight of their armour and rolled down the river bed, those that were brought to the bank were prepared for burial or cremation according to the known practice of their original tribes. Where their tribe was not known, the body was put aside for the group cremation the following morning.

It was a dismal business, and only when the casualties were made as comfortable as possible and the dead disposed decently was it possible to build the marching camp. Lucius held a staff meeting after the evening meal. None of the staff officers had been badly injured in the brief action and, with Lucius, they made a small circle of six around the fire. It was still light; Lucius had never become used to the length of daylight in Britain during the summer and after five years it still seemed strange to have sixteen hours of daylight - and almost another hour of dawn and dusk. Dungan and Aiden as primus of infantry and cavalry respectively, made their reports on the fitness of their commands, Meron and Tascat as seconds to the two primus, reported on the care of the wounded and the transport of the worst cases back to Cantodunon, Tazak, quartermaster for the expedition had the hardest task - much had been recovered from the sunken boat, but the task of recovering pilum from amongst the dense woods was incomplete, as was the reallocation of recovered weapons from the dead to those of the wounded who had lost them.

Nevertheless, it was clear to Lucius that his officers had a firm grip of the present situation and that the force was fit to carry on its tasks tomorrow. "Meron and Tascat, all the badly wounded will go back by boat, the road is not fit for ambulance wagons. It means that all the supplies must be transferred to the rest of the boats, but it will only take a day to ship the wounded back to Cantodunon - we should have it back the day after tomorrow. Make sure that everything is ready to go down river immediately after breakfast."

Meron interjected with, "It is sun-up in another seven hours General, there's room for another thirty two oarsmen, two sets of oars working in succession might get the boat to the town late morning and return it by nightfall."

His eyebrows rising at this, Lucius considered the schedule indicated by this, "Have you checked on the tide and the time of the bore up the Trent?"

"Yes Lord, it's no bother at all, they'll go down on the tide, wait for the bore to pass them and then follow it up to Cantodunon. With a quick turn around they'll return to the Abos on the ebb - and with two teams of oarsmen and an empty boat, come swiftly up river against

the tide."

"Well that's heartening, but I wouldn't count on an empty boat, they'll be taking a list from Tazak of our new requirements - in particular, I want four more ballista - unmounted ones that we can set athwart the boats. If we leave out the midship oars there'll be room enough. I'd have more sent up, but I don't suppose there'll be room will there?"

Merun shook his head, "No Lord, but I'll ask for more to be sent upriver as soon as possible."

"Do that." He turned to Dungan and Aiden, "We have eight boats left to continue to the surveyed site tomorrow, I want them to set off as soon as the burial and cremation ceremonies are finished decently. No point in allowing the men to brood on today's debacle."

Dungan interrupted, "But we beat them Lord, they fled as soon as we brought the ballista to bear."

Lucius gave them a wry grin, "And you think that was a victory? Listen, my lads. Today's affair was a defeat for us." He quietened to swift denials with an uplifted hand, "All right. We are not going to proclaim it as such, but I want you all to be aware of what happened. Someone with more intelligence than we've come across in the Brigante before, arranged a highly successful ambush with a limited number of men. He kept them under control until the second boat in the line was under the deadfall, neatly isolating the first - and he continued to prevent his warriors from prancing about on the bank in their usual fashion, while they proceeded to unleash one discharge of spears after another into the disorganised boats. Then, as soon as we began to inflict casualties on them he withdrew in good order, taking the wounded with him."

He looked around at their intent faces, glowing highlights from the fire on the prominent features making them all seem less juvenile than usual in this young army, "The Brigantes lost nine dead - we have lost sixty seven so far and two more who are in danger of joining them before morning. Nine to sixty nine and a neat withdrawal! That's a victory in any man's army. No lads, we lost this one ... now let's prevent any repeat of it shall we. You first Dungan and then the cavalry situation, Aiden."

Dungan was a small man, hard and lean, with an unsmiling face and prematurely balding light brown hair. He leant forward to deliver his comments - this was not a formal meeting. "I propose we transport six centuries over to the right bank, they can make a rough trackway and start clearing the wood back from the bank. That leaves us with three

centuries for the right bank for road building and wood clearing and the cavalry for protection - although I cannot see the Brigante launching an attack on this side."

"We didn't see the other attack either. Look ... suppose you wanted to attack us here on this bank, how would you go about it?" Dungan and Aiden exchanged chastened glances, they had obviously conferred before the meeting and missed this point. After an uncomfortable pause for thought Dungan made a quick recovery, "I'd choose or make a fordable position across the river and set my ambush so that the legion passed between it and the bank. Two groups to cut it in three after the first two or three flights of spears and then hack through to the ford, leaving disorganised infantry between me and the cavalry. A small reserve on the bank with a good supply of missiles to discourage pursuit by the remains of the infantry and then I'd split up and retreat through the woods pretty damn quickly."

Lucius grinned widely, "Very good, very good indeed, but why didn't you think of that before, eh?"

He softened the reprimand almost immediately, "Never get immersed in your own role in a battle to the extent that you forget what the enemy might do. Stay in two minds. As you make your own depositions try to maintain a separate part of your mind calculating how you would circumvent them. Look; you all know that the important thing is to maintain the initiative and not be forced simply to react, but just as important is to recognise the point at which you might lose that initiative and how your enemy might be proposing to achieve that very result. Don't dither while you do it, but stay alert to the possibilities, stay above the battle and see where you are vulnerable, look to see how the situation might be changed by a bold stroke and keep a reserve well placed to defeat it.

"I've said this before. No matter how small your force, try to make a reserve and keep your eyes open. Even a dozen good men, kept back from the fracas, can turn a battle if you bring them up at the right moment and in the right place. Even Caesar made some blunders, but he always managed to reverse a bad situation by bringing up, or creating a reserve - often leading it himself. Keep it in mind."

Lucius was well pleased with his staff, although only Dungan and Aiden had spoken it was clear from the unspoken responses of the rest that the situation was well understood and that the dispositions Dungan had suggested made sense to them.

"One last thing," Lucius stood up and moved towards the screened off portion that formed his bedroom and private office, "get the engineers working on clearing the river of the

wreck and the deadfall andhas anybody thought to examine the river for deadfalls that either failed or were not used and are still hanging up there?"

He laughed at the shock in their faces, "Well see to it, before any boats move up or downstream, I wouldn't relish explaining to Lord Gregory how his legion came to lose more boats to the same trick. In fact it would be one of you that would do the explaining.

"Goodnight ... sleep well, lads !"

Chapter Fourteen

New Derwenta 42 AD End of April

Saith ached all over his body and his feet were so sore, that on this single day of rest for the new recruits, he was loth to put them to the floor. He lay on the platform that served as his bed and seat in this barracks of sixteen men and an optio, and munched dolefully at a fist sized chunk of camp bread and a piece of cheese half its size. It was a very good cheese he admitted and he blessed the comrade who had brought it to him. His feet were thickly bandaged over a generous layer of a pungent mixture of fat and herbs that the medico had ordered when he 'reported sick' yesterday morning. Whether it was having any effect as yet was difficult to tell, for some reason or other his feet had developed a rash when he first put on his army boots, and subsequent drills and marches had gradually aggravated the condition until after eight days he had practically crawled off the parade ground. One look at Saith's feet had been enough for the medico.

"For the love of Lugh, boy. What have you been doing to them?" He was quite clearly horrified at the sight.

"I don't know centurion." Camelodian ranks carried through all the departments of the legion, Gregory had decided long ago that the Roman multiplicity of titles and pay scales was too complicated. Rome had to cope with the legacy of hundreds of years of development; Camelod was starting afresh and could set up its own more simplified ranks.

He told the tale of the boots and the rash and the medical officer seized upon the puzzle with enthusiasm. "Tell me, what do you normally wear on your feet?"

Saith just stopped himself from giving the obvious, short answer, "shoes", he had already had an unpleasant experience with an accusation of dumb insolence and was not about to court another. "Just ordinary leather shoes sir, from leather tanned in old Derwenta."

"And these are boots from leather bought in Gaul." Centurion Maldo leaned back on his stool,

"Maybe it's something in the leather." That too, was something that Saith knew it was wiser not to comment upon. The centurion sighed, "I'll wait and see if anybody else has this trouble, but in the meantime, legionary, you stay in bed until these feet are fit to stand on. Dismiss."

Saith was ungracious enough to wonder why it had not occurred to the medico to order some sort of assistance; it was over a hundred yards to his barracks. Fortunately two fellow recruits caught up with him (it was not difficult in his present state), and carried him to his bed. That was yesterday. He wondered glumly what tomorrow would bring - he had not made a good start in his new career. It had never occurred to him that a cavalryman would have to drill and march and practice with the heavy wooden swords - he had not been anywhere near a horse since he took his oath and joined the five hundred new recruits in the fort at New Derwenta. According to his optio, a cheerful man with none of the unpleasant attributes of the drill optios, it would be months before they were allowed near horses.

"Legionary first, cavalryman second." Pronounced optio Marc, "That's what Lord Lucius tells us - and he's right, you know. Learn your basic soldiering first, toughen your body, learn discipline, learn how to survive on a battlefield or an ambush and, above all, learn how to use your weapons with extreme aggravation - then you'll be fit to join the cavalry and learn horsemanship. After all, what if you have a horse killed under you in battle, eh? Go home? No! Whether on horse or foot a cavalryman is an accomplished soldier." And that was how it had been up until now and in fact, the drill instructors had kept them busy enough that not one of Saith's barrack mates would have had the energy to clamber onto the most even tempered horse, if they were given the chance.

He was in the barrack room on his own now, the others had all gone off to make good use of their free time. Saith thought of Rowena. Was she still in her father's house? He gave a self-deprecating laugh, well, of course she was. Nothing had changed yet, nothing could until he finished recruit training and was accepted into the legion as a soldier and a citizen. Renfrew was a citizen now, he knew. Did that make Rowena one too? When he, Saith, became a citizen could they get married? Rowena would be a woman then - her sixteenth birthday was in July, but her father might still have rule over her. Was that right? Saith knew something of the laws of Camelod, but not enough to settle questions like those, but, and his face brightened at the thought, every married citizen was provided with a small house with a few yards of garden around it and, unlike Roman legionaries Camelod's soldiers were allowed - indeed encouraged, to marry and produce children. He would only have to live in barracks when he was on garrison duty at one of the forts or on campaign, outside that he and Rowena would live in their own house.

If they could get married.

He shifted restlessly on his bed. Leisure was a mixed blessing, it gave him time to think endlessly about matters that he had too little knowledge to resolve. Cavalryman! Marco

had told the recruits that it would be about six months until they began cavalry training, but they would be accepted before then and receive their citizenship papers on the day they finished recruit training. Could they get married the day after? Damn! He was back to the same subject again. He must do something to distract himself with. With a grimace he reached up and unhooked a bundle of wax tablets off the wall. Every soldier had to learn to read. They had already had one lesson in the hut that stood at the north end of this barrack line, and he had a vague picture of what he was supposed to do. These tablets had the Roman alphabet scratched onto the wax - and this one, he picked it out - was his name 'SAITH'.

They did not have to learn Latin. The druid college had rescinded its old ban on writing (with the exception of druidic lore), and gone to the extent of adapting the British form of the Celtic language to Roman letters. At the moment, he could only remember the sounds of a couple of handfuls of the letters S.A.I.T.H. amongst them - although he still could not understand how 'I' got in there. He lay back and dutifully spoke out the sounds of the letters he could remember. The instructor, a druid with the most impressive beard he had ever seen, had stated categorically that any word could be represented by grouping letters together. There was a thought - a silent language! A grin spread over his face, he could swear at the drill instructor without being overheard! Just write the words down on a piece of papyrus, or thin beechwood board - or a wall!

He didn't think he would risk it though, their DI was also the swordmaster and that wooden sword of his raised the biggest welts he had ever seen or felt. What was Rowena doing now? he wondered, the hand that held the tablets up in front of him slowly dropping until they rested on his stomach. It wasn't time for supervising the second milking yet. There were the laundry maids. There was always a huge quantity of personal and household linen and wool to clean - it was a daily task. And Renfrew's servants did the fulling for the household themselves, every piece of woven cloth that came out of their little weaving shed was fulled in the trough outside. There was plenty of work for Rowena to have charge of - far too much in his opinion. And that was a reason for Renfrew to resist her marrying him - or anyone else yet.

Who could he ask about Camelod marriage laws? The writing instructor! He **was** a druid for Heaven's sake. He should know. Saith made a resolution to see the man as soon as he could get the use of his feet back.

Next morning, as the barracks turned out in obedience to an enthusiastic 'wake up' call, Saith was reawoken from his own slumbers by a vigorous hand on his shoulder.

"You too, Lad." It was Marc, grasping a pair of crutches in the other hand and grinning down at the dishevelled man, "Medical officer says to use these, wash, collect your breakfast and get over to the reading school, smartly."

"Smartly optio?" The optio gave a little grunt of laughter and cast a wry look at the crude crutches, "Well as smartly as you can manage. Class starts in half an hour."

Saith staggered through his toilet and grabbed the last flat loaf from the basket before it was twitched off the counter and whisked into the back of the bakery. Nibbling on that and taking swigs from his water flask, he struggled along on one, then two and then one crutch, managing the complex operations of eating, drinking and transportation in a very disorderly manner.

The fort was still being built. Walls enclosed it on four sides and four gatehouses faced west, south and east and north - the last faced uphill and was only wide enough to let a century of cavalry trot in or out in twos. It was a standard layout of roadways within the fort, although Saith could not be expected to know that. What he did know was what the land had looked like before the fort was cut into the lower slopes of the hill.

The principia with its legionary offices occupied the middle of the meadow where, as a six year old, he and his friends had hunted for pignuts - and eaten them. He could not understand their enthusiasm now, it was hard enough finding the small white flowers on their wispy stalks, then they had to be dug out of turf that had never felt a plough and was as tough and as knife resistant as a triple leather shield. Finally you held a fat, pointy little object with white flesh and a chestnut brown skin, popped it in your mouth - and it was awful! Hard and starchy. And you looked around at your mates, all eating their own finds and wondered, 'Do they think they're awful too?'. Probably.

His feet and crutches stumbled along the road, past the principia back towards the barrack lines and the school. There were vinegar leaves in that meadow too. Quite refreshing really, after a meal of five or six small pignuts, but the meadow was thick with sheep droppings and he realised now that the small leaves must have been fairly liberally doused in urine too. Gods, the things they'd done as lads - it was a wonder any of his gang had survived.

Over in the corner of the north and west walls a barred culvert allowed a stream to flow into the fort's cistern and on along the trench to the latrines. They used to catch crawfish there. Pieces of iron wire begged from the knife maker, twisted into hooks on the end of a

coarse string rolled from wool gathered off the thistles and brambles. Just a little bit of bread stuck on the end and then they sank them with a bit of clay and let the baited hook drift under the old clapper bridge - gone now of course and the great stone probably incorporated into the walls of the fort. Little claw would poke out from under a rock and fondle the bait inquisitively - and if you were careful you could draw the crawfish out from its rock and within reach of a net on the end of a slender pole. Now they **did** taste good, popped into a clay pot of water heated by dropping hot stones in it. He had not tasted crawfish for years - it was a sad lack.

Whoops! He was there, breakfast finished, flask slung on his belt and becoming quite skilled on his crutches. There was just the one step up into the school, and - all thanks to Lugh - he wasn't the last.

On the Ouse

They had taken their time in reaching the next site and they continued up river with considerable caution. The banks were cleared on both sides to a distance of fifty paces from the river, much of the timber was alder a wet rot resistant wood that found a ready use in the river bank works that Lucius installed as they went along, small jetties, protective barks for the larger ones (two of them only between Isur and the northern fort of Pencalda) and plenty to be floated down river. There were no more attacks, but three traps had been set. The first, and most effective was an affair of sharpened tree boughs, anchored to the bottom at their upstream ends and held down at the other by ropes and a simple trigger mechanism at the end of a long cord. Some unseen hands pulled on the ropes as the second boat in line passed over it and the suddenly freed ends arrowed to the surface and stove in the hull.

The loss of life was much lower, Lucius had ordered the removal of armour and had relied on the wattle shields. Two men were drowned and one killed by a bough that pierced the hull and then his chest. It could have been worse. Cavalry on both banks responded instantly, but no Brigantes were found, only the length of cord leading across the cleared ground. There were now seven boats and the fleet covered just one and a half miles that day.

Two more traps; the one a repeat of the tethered timbers - that was forestalled when a cavalryman spotted the trigger rope and barely missed catching the man who was to have set it off. The second a crude matter of three logs sent floating down river, but the flow of water was slow and grapnels were flung to capture the logs and bring them into the bank

and out of the path of the boats. The ten miles between the first ambush and Pencalda took four days and at the end of that time both infantry and cavalry had perfected their surveillance - and their response to ambush, traps - and suspected traps. At a cost of one boat and three men, Lucius considered it a successful and valuable training exercise. The Brigante were continuing to be a problem though, he had not expected that they would withdraw from their conquests on the river so easily, but neither had he expected that after they had done so there would be these continuing attacks. It was not a form of warfare that he had had come across during his service with the Roman legions. At Pencalda he had a full legionary sized fortress built - his present force of a little over two cohorts (including the Parisi for the sake of the numbers), would rattle about in it for the time being, but it would make a sound base for dominating the eastern Brigante settlements - which, he judged, were the source of his present concerns.

Over the next six or seven months, Pencalda fortress saw a great deal of activity and little warfare. The staff at the principia grew under the control of his staff officers, junior officers and clerks being brought upriver from Cantodunon to manage the welter of diplomatic activity, recruiting and assembly of supplies for an extended campaign in the spring.

Lucius left the fortress when he considered that his staff were fully competent, and journeyed down the Ure, Ouse, Abos and up the Trent to Cantodunon - and then on to Windubro. It was August, the first time he had seen his family in ten months - and the first sight he had of his new son, born four months ago. Gregory saw to it that he was given a hero's welcome; the recent campaign had not produced much in the way of booty or new trade as yet, but it **had** increased Camelod's physical size by a quarter and probably doubled its influence. That was a considerable achievement.

With the Pencalda and New Derwenta fortresses complete and the macrostructure of the military establishment well in hand, Lucius felt that it was time to bring Drusus's pet spymaster from Gaul. He was a Spaniard, from Gades. Gaius Avitas arrived three weeks later and took up residence in Lucius private office as his secretary. Nobody commented - the only surprise was that Lucius had avoided having a private secretary wished on him before now. The man was quiet, of medium build and no features that stood out in any way, dark brown complexion, deep brown eyes, straight black hair kept very short - and he rarely had anything to say for himself.

Lucius's opinion was at odds, with that, in his experience the man rarely stopped talking, but he had to admit that what he had to say revealed a depth of knowledge of human nature and a very great cunning in manipulating it. Camelod's general learned a great deal, both by instruction and by argument - strenuous arguments. It was fortunate that his

office was upstairs and far from any chance of being overheard by any, but Lucius's servants; it would have raised eyebrows if a mere personal secretary was heard calling him an unthinking clown. Despite his frequent complaints to Gregory it was clear to his friend that Lucius enjoyed the verbal confrontations. Slowly he constructed a system of paperwork, coded for security that would become operational just as soon as he made his first forays into the lands to the south and east - for that was where the greatest threat was most likely to be. Cyphering was another of the concerns that Gaius Avitas went into deeply and to Lucius's own amazement (for he was not inclined to enjoy letters) the whole business was fascinating - he was captivated by the construction and the solving of cyphers. Far more than was warranted by need because it was unlikely in the extreme that he would ever need to use his skill in Britain for anything other than communication with his own agents.

In the first days of October Lucius made one of his surveying trips around an already well surveyed area, Ratas and in the course of several evenings drinking and singing, studied, approached and eventually recruited his first agent. He was sure that his companions had noticed nothing unusual, Lucius was known for his rather heavy handed conviviality and his tendency to disappear quietly from the group. They all knew what that meant and made bets on the woman responsible. Nobody even came near guessing the reason this time and Lucius came back well pleased, to continue his study with something more concrete - a nascent spy ring!

Camelod's industry and commerce were fully capable of supporting the development of the Ouse/Ure/Derwent lands, the iron mines on the Severn and the multiplication of ironworks driven by the waterwheels had continued to increase their production of goods for export. Camelod's consumption of her factory's, mines' and foundries' products was a tiny part of her whole production. The only shortfall lay in the spinning and weaving of wool for cloth. The need for clothing fabrics had increased greatly as a result of two factors; the obvious one was in the provision of uniforms for the growing numbers of legionaries and recruits, but the other was simply the result of prosperity upon a population that had become accustomed to having and using money in the last four years or so. It had taken some time for the majority to do any more than hoard the silver, but now the influence of an import trade in luxury goods was clear to anybody. Even during the eight months that Lucius had been away, the trade had grown and its effects surprised him. A small number of weavers were producing fine woollen garments, but in the main they had to be imported to meet the demand.

Previously it had only been merchants who had worn linens, fine wool and some small items of silk; now the fabrics could be seen on every fifteenth day market and any

occasion when workaday clothes were put aside. The Celtic love of colourful clothes had gone far beyond brightly coloured heavy woolen cloaks, tunics and shawls, decorated with whatever jewellery they could afford. Women adorned their heads and shoulders with diaphanous linens from Egypt, dyed in exotic colours from all around the middle sea. Tunics of smooth, very finely woven wool from sheep bred in the Pyrenees, dresses of equally fine and, above all, light materials were kilted in with girdles that had gold thread woven into them. Men had relegated their heavy Celtic fabrics to workaday use and enthusiastically bought their finery and celebratory clothes from the exotic output of Egypt, Gaul, Hispania and Italy - and the jewellery was more likely to be spidery constructions of gold and silver than the solid, animalistic cloak pins, broaches and torcs that they had worn previously.

Food had changed too. Wine imports had more than doubled in the ten months of Lucius's absence, Garum, a pungent fish sauce, was an increasingly common part of an ordinary household's kitchen supplies - even where the 'kitchen' was simply a couple of Windubro's iron pots. Fruit came across the channel, mountain cured hams, rock hard cheeses, spices and any number of items for 'special' occasions - there was an increasing number of those too. So many in fact that Gregory had suggested to Brioc that a formalised calendar of holidays be constructed to limit the number of times that a man or woman might decide to cease work and hold a celebration. The calendar was under discussion now and Gregory and his high council were arguing about the days of celebration - the original schedule allowed for fifty five days in the year. Gregory considered that too high and suggested that they adopt the eighth day of rest recently introduced to the legion plus the four days of the Celtic celebration of Imbolc, Beltane, Samain and Lughnasa. It was still unresolved.

Gregory had been surprised by the response of his councillors. Until Windubro had been created, men and women worked every day except the four festivals. Now that they were paid and had silver at their belts, they wanted time to enjoy their wealth. In fairness, he supposed, they worked harder now than they ever did when there was no inducement in the form of earnings. Shepherds in Windubro, for instance, looked after flocks of more than a thousand each and ran a handful of dogs to control them - they also rode around on Brigantean hill ponies now. At night when they were guarding the flocks against wolves or human predators, they carried the iron weapons that they used for town guard duty and often wore at least part of their armour. A single shepherd did the work that five or six would have done previously and the comparison between the metalworkers of today with those of earlier years was even more startling. Heron's machines and some of the innovations that his Celtic students had wrought on their own account had multiplied the work of a single man or woman by a factor of ten or more.

Camelod could afford leisure time for its people and still boast an economy that could not be equalled anywhere else in the known world. Not that much of the world recognised that fact, nor would it for some time to come, Britain was still a miniscule population by comparison with the Roman empire, located, as it was, on the very edge of civilisation. Although the impact of its economy was out of proportion to its population it was still puny at the side of the Gaulish, Spanish and Italian economies.

Despite the expeditions along the rivers Derwent, Ouse and Ure and the money spent on building forts, signal posts and towns Camelod had a surplus of twelve and half million sesterces this year after making a citizens' share payment of one hundred and seventy sesterces each (a total of almost ten million). His own and Lucius's fortunes, spread around several bankers on the continent as well as hoarded in their own strong rooms was huge, just over twenty million sesterces each. On the basis of an idea that Gregory was not yet prepared to argue with Lucius, he had spent two million of his private funds on horses from Friesland. Friesian horses were something of an oddity, much heavier than those used for Roman and auxiliary cavalry, much slower too, they stood five and a half feet high at the shoulder. The Friesians bred them for draught animals, their wide hooves made them ideal for marshy ground and their weight was a distinct advantage when ploughing heavy land. Cattle were considered to be for meat since oxen had problems in the soggy lands and horses did not. In these lands of northern Europe, although mostly among the semi-civilised people on the right bank of the Rhine, Friesian horses did most of the ploughing, and hauling. Their broad backs made for uncomfortable bareback riding and few Cimri, Teutoni and Parisi in the region could afford saddles for a luxury like horse transport. Gregory knew of the horses and had made a short trip on the Fortunate Voyager to see them. The sight was more inspiring than the written descriptions he had and in a moment of unaccustomed self-indulgence Gregory produced two million in gold and arranged for eighty stallions and twice as many mares to be shipped to Bido where they would be driven to the huge pasture lands to the north west of New Derwentia. Shipping cost him more than the animals themselves and required another hundred thousand on top of his original two million sesterces. He did not give it the slightest consideration, Gregory had more money than he could dispose of - unless he developed some very expensive habits - providing the foundation for the idea that had come to him was worth the gamble. Gamble it certainly was, for he was thinking of the animals as cavalry horses, strong enough to carry heavily armoured men on their backs - and be armoured themselves. Whether men could be trained to ride and control these great beasts, whether they would be fast enough to make a concerted charge, were both questions he could not answer, but if they were no good as cavalry, they could certainly pull enormous loads by wagon and barge. They began grazing the fat pastures in the new

province at the end of May, of 42. With luck he could breed sufficient foals from the imported mares and three hundred of the best of their present breed, to have three year olds ready for 46. Not all as heavy as his vision but heavy enough to test out his idea in the field against the Roman legions - supposing that they held back until then.

Elections had been held again at Lughnasa - it was the second in the two towns and the first since the formation of Camelod. The population of Camelod was more than half as large again as in 40 AD, but the same number of councillors were selected, the proportion of voters per councillor being adjusted - it would be a long time before the scheduled proportion of five thousand voters per councillor was reached. The new faces in the chamber at Cantodunon represented the new towns and settlements, twenty four men and women in all. Once again the elections had passed without violence or much approbrium, Gregory supposed that the election behaviour that he remembered from Alexandria and Rome would evolve sooner or later, but certainly his people were conducting their fledgling politics with great decorum at the moment.

Gregory had good reason to feel confident of the future even though the news from Rome showed the war party growing in influence.

Sitting in the summer sun Myrcal was well satisfied too. Gregory had promised her a new house in the purely civilian town that would be the administrative centre of Camelod, but she really could not believe that the garden would be more peaceful and convenient than this one. It was formed by the four sides of the State House - a rectangle fifty yards by seventy. A landscape gardener had been brought from Italy; a man who had worked for some very wealthy clients indeed, but even his eyebrows had lifted at the requirements she laid down and the easy way in which his estimates were accepted. Myrcal smiled quietly, there was more silver and gold on deposit in her bank and Gregory's than many magnates or aristocrats in Rome possessed. Camelod's prosperity was their's too.

It had been designed to give her a feeling of wildness. The miniature terrain had hillocks and a small stream, clusters of bushes and small trees divided the garden into arbors and nooks. There were places where the house was hidden up to the second floor, smooth springy turf, beds of bracken, little rocky cliffs almost as high as a man and tangled briars artfully pruned and shaped to appear wild at the same time as their sharp claws were curtailed. No-one entered the garden unsummoned, except the family. Visitors announced their presence with a bell hung at the entrance from the atrium and waited until called or Myrcal or Gregory came to greet them. It was the one place in Camelod where husband

and wife could be completely sure of not being interrupted. Far more so than in their bedroom. Consequently it had taken the place of a bedroom for their sexual adventures. And in the winter? Gregory had built a small boudoir with its own hypocaust fed from the heating system of the house.

At the moment it was commerce that engaged her attention. She dictated to a secretary details of contracts, queries on deliveries, quotations and simple greetings to men and women she was cultivating for either business or politics. It was not merely trade that she exercised her talents upon, allies in Gaul, Lower Germania and Hispania were sought and flattered. She did not deceive herself into thinking that all of this work was fruitful, but if ten out of a hundred felt that they were valued by Camelod and that, in turn, there was value in supporting her, she would be doing very well. The noise of the children was a non-distracting background, all of them were out of sight and playing with their nurses. They were good nurse maids, the childish cries were excited and laughing; there was no fractiousness, no quarreling, and that was a tremendous achievement for little Primus was six years old and considered himself well on the way to manhood, wielded a wooden sword, rode his own pony and insisted on martial games. That suited Caley, Mycal's eldest daughter, but Primus objected strongly to competition from his sister. Unfortunately, as is often the case, Caley had grown faster than Primus and was evenly matched in strength - and emphatic in proving it. Litabel, thank Lugh, was more tractable, less adventurous - and Driscoll was cradle bound.

"That will do for now, Merghal. Bring me the scrolls when they are done so that I can sign them and have them off tomorrow. Then" The letters would be travelling to the new factories on the Severn as well as many old friends on the other side of the channel.

"..see if you find Lord Gregory and tell him I want to eat here tonight. And you'd better remind Somha too. Off you go now." She watched the lithe figure sway along the path with a completely unconscious display of female qualities and sighed, after four children she knew her own figure was not what it had been when she courted and wed Gregory - although she had to admit he seemed to be well satisfied with the additional flesh she carried. 'Which,' she thought, looking down critically at herself, 'is not too surprising.'

Myrcal smiled complacently, she had worked continuously for six hours, she deserved a little entertainment. For a moment she wondered whether to bathe in the tiny heated pool, now, but then decided it would be more fun shared with Gregory.

Cambria August 42 AD

It had been a prosperous year for Venutius as well. More gold had been brought out of the ground than the locals thought possible, four hundred and ten pounds which was worth well over two million sesterces - but then, **they** had been content to merely dig the surface, Venutius demanded more than that - his miners worked deep in the ground, tunneling, dragging out hundreds of baskets of earth and dying in annoying numbers. The raids that he had instituted to provide slaves for the mines were ranging further afield and soon he knew he must halt them or come into conflict with the larger tribes before he had dealt with Camelod, but his standing with the Brigantes was stronger than before the unfortunate business at Windubro, the town on the Cothi was neat, copying Windubro to a certain extent, although the buildings were mainly quite traditional - and it was populated by three thousand warriors and their followers. And there were more men pledged to him in the Pennines and more gave their promises every month, for Cartimandua had made a near fatal error.

He had known her for a lusty woman and gained much enjoyment from it in the past, but now she had taken a young man to her house, breaking her marriage vows to him and affronting her nobles and warriors. The tales that came to him were lurid in the extreme - they surely could not all be true? But they no longer moved him. He was done with the woman and, when the Romans landed, as the letter that he held in his hand promised, Queen Cartimandua would be executed for adultery. Then, with the whole strength of the Brigante and the allies that his new wealth and the gold from Rome would buy, he would crush Camelod.

His spies brought him excellent intelligence of the Camelodians, who were spreading themselves far and wide; their army must be stretched to breaking now with its commitments along the Ouse, Ure and Derwent. It was almost time for his revenge for the debacle of a couple of years ago. Venutius had a little diversion planned using the eastern Brigante, that would ensure that a large part of the Camelodian army was pinned down in their new fort at Pencalda. Pinned there whilst they were slaughtered on the Severn and down the Trent. There would be a tremendous bloodletting - and enormous wealth to be won. All that was needed was a little patience until his wealth and the men committed to him had increased a fraction more. Just a little.

October 42 AD

Saith stood at the door of Renfrew's new Camelodian-style house. It had a wooden portico, wide doors and it stretched away on either side for a distance of almost thirty feet. It was intimidating - and so was the major-domo who opened the door.

"Legionary Saith calls on Renfrew Lucellos." It had not taken Renfrew long to adopt the Gaulish habit of tacking Latin sounding names to their Celtic ones.

To his relief Saith was allowed in and shown a bench to sit on while Renfrew decided whether he would respond or not. That was promising, at least his name had not been noted as "not to be admitted under any pretext." He sat down, back upright, helmet clasped in both hands and resting on his knees, short scarlet mantle spread over his shoulders and, despite not wearing full armour, looking very martial in leather shirt, woolen breeches and full length boots - his foot problem had disappeared months ago leaving a relieved recruit and a puzzled medico. After almost desperate pleading on Saith's part the centurion had agreed that the incident did not need to be entered on the recruit's records, an event that Saith was convinced would definitely hamper his promotion.

A noise at one of the doorways into the house caught his attention, it swung open carefully (although surely no door in that house would squeak), to admit Rowena.

"Saith."

"Rowena."

It was not an imaginative dialogue, but it **had** been six months since they last saw each other and neither was sure how the other felt after such an interval. Saith knew what he wanted to ask, the problem was that he could not bring himself to utter the words. Strange that at an age when the blood runs hottest and has the most need of expression, the tongue is singularly inarticulate. A repeat performance was probably safest.

"Rowena."

"Saith."

"Have you missed me?" His brain had grown a little cooler and was operating again - if sluggishly.

She walked towards him and halted a couple of paces away, standing with hands clasped in front of her, "Yes, my dear, I've missed you - desperately, but Father will be here soon and there's something I must say."

He made a move to interrupt, but she stopped him with a gentle movement of one hand. "No Saith, listen to me first. There is no way that my father will agree to my marrying you -

yet., but I won't marry anyone else and I am sixteen in December and if you are a citizen by then .."

I'm one now, Rowena! I took my oath yesterday as a legionary."

She gave him a broad smile, "Well that's a good step forward, then. As I was saying if we are both citizens - and I will be on my birthday, you can apply to the fort commander for permission to marry me and Father cannot object."

Saith's eyes widened, "I didn't know that."

"Father won't like it, so try not to provoke him. It's going to be difficult for him when I leave - unless he marries again. My sisters are not very practical, so who'sshhh."

The door flung open this time and Renfrew strode in, red faced as ever and breathing heavily. "You're here," he accused, "Rowena said she thought you'd been taken into to the garden."

"I'm sorry Father, I was mistaken."

"Hmph! Mistaken! Well what have you to say to me young Saith? I gather you won't be wanting your old job back?"

"No sir. I'm a legionary now and beginning basic cavalry training tomorrow."

"Well I hope you like horses, then. What's that to do with me, then?"

"I'm entered for a junior officer's course at Cantodunon, sir under Septimus Causta. I shall be away for six months and I wished to ask you sir, if I can marry your daughter when I have my commission?"

"Marry Rowena? Certainly not. I'm a wealthy man of considerable standing and I expect a much worthier husband for Rowena than you." He stared at the youth - who seemed singularly unmoved by this declaration, "Well? You'd better be leaving, now. I won't have you making fond farewells. This is the end of your aspirations, young man." Renfrew called out for the major-domo and watched Saith as he was ushered out.

"And as for you young lady, I don't want any silly womanish behaviour. There are the servants to see to you know; they won't set to work on their own, for Gods' sakes."

"Of course not Father," Rowena smiled in a manner that made Renfrew feel distinctly uneasy. "I'll set them to their tasks right away."

"Good." He did not feel any more easy about her attitude though. Weren't young women supposed to greet this sort of situation with floods of tears? She was a strange girl though, hard working, but definitely strange. Nothing like her mother had been. Now **there** was a woman who recognised her proper place and didn't walk about the house with expressions on her face that made a man feel uncomfortable. "It's a shame she's dead. It would be really useful to have a woman's view of Rowena's attitude." He'd missed her for the first two years, but then Rowena was old enough to help run the house and it did not really matter any more.

Renfrew went back to his office and thought no more about the matter. December was an unpleasant surprise.

Saith and his nineteen fellow officer recruits, had their first view of Cantodunon from the river. They were riding one of the smaller 'fast boats' that Lucius had had built for transportation, having ten foot beam and carrying only the aspiring young officers and a crew of twelve, the boat was propelled by twelve oars - none of the legionaries from New Derwenta were competent oarsmen. It was shortly after the bore had passed upriver and the passage was not smooth. One of the results of taming the bore with the dam at Cantodunon was a reflected wave that was safe, but very uncomfortable for men unused to it. The young officers arrived, in a somewhat dishevelled condition.

The town occupied both banks of the river Trent, to their left the original fortified town overlooked the river, its' wall mounted ballista dominating all traffic, except where the wharves blocked the field of fire - a matter of annoyance for the commander of the fort, primus Caionac. Such a post called for a tribune at least - a legate would be more normal for a garrison of eight cohorts of infantry, but Lucius felt that promotion to tribune could wait a little longer.

Few civilians lived within the walls nowadays, the leading men, including the Secretaries, Brioc (when he left Clarbre), visiting merchants, town and major settlement councillors and tribal chieftains were housed as guests in the town villas, but by far the largest part of Cantodunon's burgeoning population lived in the neat rows of houses of widely varying dimensions that followed the contours of the land around the fort - at a distance of four hundred yards from its' walls. Riverside buildings were mainly workshops, granaries,

warehouses and one or two houses belonging to the master craftsmen and a few traders. A new suburb was springing up on the outskirts of the swampy ground beyond the bankside buildings of the left bank; as drainage works progressed these homes were creeping towards the bank, stretching out an arm towards the northern side of the bridge that rode the top of the dam. and arched over the boat slide.

Saith had never seen so many people. From the lecture that they had been given before setting out, he knew that the fort housed three thousand infantry and two cohorts of cavalry and four centuries of mobile ballistas. There were one thousand recruits being trained outside the fort and a small holding camp for new applicants. The civilian population was more than twelve thousand men and women - not counting the children. The lectures had not mentioned children! Saith stared about him at the constant movement of people. It was only a small part of the population, he knew, but it was still impressive. Derwenta had almost four thousand adults, including the recruits - Cantodunon was populated by four times, possibly five times as many, but it seemed more, possibly because there was much more mobility. In old Derwenta men had worked the hours of sunlight, never moving from their appointed place of labour and most lived where they worked - only the traders, merchants, warriors and nobles lived in the round houses with space around them; everyone else lived in the crowded bothies.

It was only a short step from the wharf to the gates of Cantodunon fort and Saith wished it had taken longer, but there would be time later to examine the civilis. Through the gate they marched and up the via Principia to the Legion headquarters at the centre of the fortress. It was there that they reported to the commander's office and then were handed on to various clerks who saw to the issue of cavalry uniforms, armour and weapons, apparently they were expected to house all their equipment, even the eight foot long lance, in the billet - it clipped into a special socket against the wall at their bedheads. There were two large rooms in the barracks, which had been built onto one of the standard building plots of twenty yards by twenty two. The billets and the optio's quarters occupied almost half the plot, the rest was a parade ground that had been levelled with the roadways on three sides. Between the barracks and the parade ground ran a line of hitching posts for twenty four horses. Quickly they were taken about the place that was to be their home for the next six months and then ordered into two ranks facing the optio's office, where the first words since they had disembarked, that were not a direction or an order were spoken.

"I am your optio, " He was a short sturdy man and spoke British with a thick accent, which they later learnt was Gaulish, "my name is Publius Genta and you will call me 'Optio' at all times. Is that understood?"

"Optio", they had had this experience, or one like it, when they were first accepted as recruits in Derwenta, it was a creditably disciplined chorus.

"Ah, you've heard this before. Well let me tell you that your training here will be very different to the gentle treatment you received as legionary recruits. I am here to make you into officers and gentlemen - and I will address you as 'sir'." He gave them a very unpleasant grin, "Do not make the mistake of thinking that this actually makes you officers, but the primus says that I must treat you with proper respect. So - you will not be struck by me or any of your instructors, it is illegal for a legionary to strike an officer or even a potential officer. If punishment is required **you** will mete it out, and if I do not consider the punishment delivered with proper enthusiasm, both men will be punished."

"What if"

"Don't complete that sentence, sir. You would regret it....."

"You will have riding instructors, weapons instructors and especially sadistic instructors who will discover the limits of your endurance. Very occasionally you will receive lectures on tactics and strategy from Tribune Septimus Causa - the rest of your time you will spend with me and I will ensure that you perform all the skills you have learnt in the manner of an officer. You will not finish this course until you have either been thrown out as unworthy or have become men whom I can truly - and happily, address as 'Sir'."

For just a moment he allowed a faint hint of encouragement to soften his features, "Don't get too pleased at the possibility of being thrown out early, you would not have been sent here from Derwenta if you were useless. Now, as an act of kindness which you are going to find increasingly rare, you will parade for pay and then have until daybreak the day after tomorrow, to make acquaintanceship with the civilis. This privilege, twenty four hours leave, will repeat every eight days. Pay parade is held outside my office, over there. Form up in a single line, smartly and wait in silence - there will be no talking - on pain of being confined to barracks tomorrow. Understood?"

"Yes, Optio"

"Form Pay Parade!" He marched with a curiously stiff manner to the side and watched them trot over to the office and form up quietly. They were his first squad of British recruits. If anything they seemed to be more receptive than what he had been familiar with in his old legion, the ninth. But, it was early days yet, of course - and they were very young.

Chapter Fifteen

It was a bright, cold morning. No frost even on the tops of the fortress walls where the river mist rose and fell like slow sea waves, streaming in and out between the merlons along the parapet. Saith and Galamos had made friends on the way up river and had contrived to share the same billet. So far their experiences had been more or less pleasant, apart from the reception by Optio Genta, everything had been better than expected. The mattresses on their sleeping platforms were clean and stuffed with hay (sweeter and softer than straw), the beds were well spaced out with a clear three paces between for their equipment shelves and small writing desk. Their meal the evening before, had been roast pork with vegetables and bread. Breakfast was more bread, cooked that morning in the legion's bakery, and cold meats. Best of all their experiences on that first day, they discovered that their pay was now three hundred and sixty sesterces a year as officer recruits and their fifteen day's rate was fifteen sesterces with no deductions - the same as a full Camelod legionary. Each of them had a pouch full of copper coins at his belt. It was a regulation pouch, threaded over the belt and a long drawstring that was looped over the belt and tied in a bow, tucked behind it. It was satisfyingly heavy and swung rhythmically as they walked in full unarmed uniform, up the slight slope to the town at mid-morning.

Cantodunon Civilis was backed with wooded heights that swept from north to south along a six mile ridge. Just above the town, but not on the highest ground, stood the Nematón, a cleared area large enough for ten thousand to gather around the central pole of stripped and painted pine. From the viewpoint of the two soldiers the Nematón was small, but they knew that it would have been made from the tallest tree in the neighbourhood and drew their own conclusions about the depth and breadth of the town. It was huge. Houses were arranged in rows that flanked the roads running along the contours of the ridge. The largest and most splendid stood on the slopes with a clear view of the river - some of them very splendid indeed, built entirely of stone, others used stone or concrete only in the platform that formed their foundations and the base of the portico. On the back roads the houses were built of wood, large and small, without any obvious demarkation of position - a large house typically would be surrounded by smaller houses and gardens that abutted its own ground. Short rows of shops - and neither of the young men had seen shops before - offered goods and services, from laundrywork to vegetables, bakery with bread and cakes to enamelwork and silver. In the middle of the civilis they suddenly came across a small square, no more than fifty paces across, occupied at the moment by three tents and a small group of men playing instrument. They were dressed gaudily, in long flowing robes that had nothing British about them, cloths wrapped around their heads.

"North Africans?" Galamos queried.

Saith shrugged, these men were completely unfamiliar to him although they did have the same complexion as the men who had stolen sheep and slaves from old Derwenta. "I suppose so. Musicians I should think."

They walked past carefully, conscious of the wealth (in recruit's terms) at their belts, but none of the men paid any attention. There was a delicious smell coming from a small row of shops fifty yard along the road and they lost interest in the entertainers long before they had cleared the square. Their approach was a curious one, the smell of hot meat pies drew them irresistibly, but they had no experience of shops, merely hearsay of their purpose and their pace slowed as the little wooden building with its tray of charcoal heaters and pies hung at its' front, drew nearer.

"Are you hungry?" Galamos asked his friend, they had had breakfast late, only an hour before.

A wide grin was sufficient answer, and they tentatively walked up to the counter and rapped on the shop wall. A rosy cheeked woman looked out of leather curtains at the back. She was a good advertisement for the pies, rotund and bouncily cheerful.

"Yes young sirs?"

"How much are the pies please?"

"Ah! Hungry is it?" Beaming broadly she reached across the counter and pointed to two plump, golden crusted pies that steamed very slightly through the vent in the pastry. "Now these are just your size I reckon. Mmm? I'll take an as for the two of them."

Neither young man was familiar with coins, "What's an as?" Said Saith.

"Well now, if you will open your purses I'll point one out to you." It was the smallest copper coin they had, no larger than the nail on their little fingers - and the lowest in value that they had.

"Done." Galamos was convinced that such a delicious smell was worth far more. The deal was swiftly done and they walked on down the road, eyes and teeth both busy. It was a friendly town. Populous it may have been, but practically everyone they passed seemed to recognise their uniform. Cantodunon people had an almost parental interest in the cadets

of the fortress, it could be partly explained by the fact that every male civilian between the age of fourteen and forty was required to practice with weapons twice a month and in emergency could be called to serve in the rear ranks of the legion or serve in one of the ancillary arms. Even women assembled on the fortress walls every month to remain familiar with the serving of the great wall ballista or the throwing of smaller missiles. Militarism permeated the civil population and the young officers in training, particularly the cavalry cadets, were the darlings of the town.

Smiles greeted them at every turn, shopkeepers, men and women obviously bustling along on their own business or the business of others, merchants all seemed more than simply well disposed towards the legion. There was much to see, Cantodunon had developed greatly since the founding of the fortress, and their progress was further slowed by the number of people who struck up conversations with them. It took two hours to travel a quarter of a mile or so into the centre of the town. Progress came to a complete halt when a gaggle of young women surrounded them and in a flurry of nudges and giggles, deposited wreaths of artificial flowers on their caps.

"I can't take much more of this," Saith declared when they had won free of the laughing girls, "it's embarrassing."

Galamos however, had enjoyed the attention, "Don't be so curmudgeonly Saith. I wouldn't mind bedding one of those gorgeous creatures."

He got a sniff as a comment, fortified by, "Just see how many men come running at the first squeal, my friend. If you have any irresistible urges in that direction just give me warning and time to get half a mile away! Now look, over there. What's that building?"

It was impressive, fronted by a wide portico in stone and concrete, facing onto the main street. Narrow roads on each side separated it from its neighbours, so that they could see that it was no shallow facade, but stretched back for a hundred feet and more. Smoke rose from some unseen part of the roof, jetting upward several feet before the wind blew it sideways in shreds. There was a steady stream of men and women up the flight of three steps and in through the tall front doors and the two cadets were drawn to the foot of them by simple curiosity.

"It's a bath-house!" Declared Galamos, cricking his neck to see the frieze of animal and human designs carved in the wooden fascia above their heads.

"Gods. What a size! You could squeeze the camp bath-house four or five times into that. Shall we go in?"

"Can we afford it?" Saith was not only aware of the contents of his purse at the moment, but when he had discovered how much they were being paid, he had resolved to save as much as possible for the wedding. He was confident that he and Rowena would get their own way in that.

"Well, these are ordinary citizens going inside, most of them must get the same pay as a legionary - and that's what we get. Come on, I bet it's a lot more luxurious inside than ours."

The attendant at the door informed them that entrance was one *as* each, towels, strigils and oil one *as*, and a depository box to take their clothes and valuables three quadrantes. He waited impatiently as they struggled to add it up. "One sesterce and three quadrantes altogether."

They placed two copper sesterces in his hand, received a bronze token and waited for the change. After an uncomfortable two or three seconds the man said, "It is usual for gentlemen to tip the attendant."

"Ah!" They looked at each other in embarrassment and it was Saith who recovered first, "Keep the change."

The man gave them a cynical grin and a mock bow, "Well thank you gentlemen! Largesse indeed!" And turned to the next in line. As they moved away Galamos surreptitiously took note of what was given as a tip for one entrant. "An *as*!" He whispered in Saith's ear in pained surprise, "A whole *as*!" It had taken him less than an hour to appreciate the value of money and now, it seemed, he was well on the way to becoming frugal.

"Never mind, we're not gentlemen yet anyway. Publius Genta assured us of that yesterday."

Their laughter brought them a host of disapproving stares from both columns of citizens entering the women's and men's baths, some carrying their own towels, some doing as Saith and Galamos were about to do, and collecting them from the man behind a counter on the right of the column. "Gods, he's taking tips too!" Agonised Galamos.

"How much? Can you see?"

"Only a quadrante." Galamos gave a theatrical sigh of relief.

The queues passed quite quickly into their respective dressing rooms, and the two cadets quickly located the box that matched the key collected with their towels, stripped off and locked their uniforms and purses away. It was much more luxurious and spacious than the legionary bath houses. Although it was simpler than the big complexes in Gaul and Italy, the two young men had no knowledge of those and the size of the warm room, hot room and finally the plunge bath, fully fifty feet long, were more than enough to impress them. There was a much more leisurely atmosphere than the legionary bath houses too; men stood in groups chatting, or sat around tables set out in both the warm room and the plunge. Small booths supplied snacks and drink. Putting aside the idea of food for a time Saith and Galamos passed through into the hot room and immersed themselves in the ritual of cleansing and relaxing their bodies. Hot water for washing away the oils was provided at the centre of the room surrounded at a decent distance by tiers of wooden benches which were already well populated by sweating bodies of all shapes, although given the make up of Cantodunon's citizenry, they were mostly well below the age of thirty.

An hour of sweating, oiling and washing was as much as they could take before their bellies insisted that it was past time for replenishment, they sauntered into the now crowded warm room and the plunge and after a few minutes to see what prices were being charged, Saith, who had the key around his neck, went to fetch a couple of sesterces from the box.

"Hello, lad!"

Galamos turned quickly to see who it was. He stared, nonplussed, nudity was surprisingly disguising - it was an appreciable time before he recognised optio Genta. "Optio" he blurted out.

"No lad. Optio Publius Genta does not come to the baths - here it is simply Publius and tomorrow optio Genta will have no memory of us meeting in the bath house."

It was strange, even the harsh accent seemed less obvious now and the man was smiling in a friendly fashion. "Where's your friend? I saw you come in with Saith."

"Oh! He's gone off to get some coins from our box. Well, here he is now." And the startled Saith was introduced to their optio who once more declared that here he was plain Publius Genta.

Saith looked down at the three copper coins in his hand, "Will you eat with us op .. Publius?"

"Gladly, lad., but I pay for myself." He waved away the protestation, "No, that is one legion rule that **does** carry over into these pleasant surroundings. Cadets do not make gifts to their instructors. Just think about it. It makes good sense. Now let's see what we have, shall we?" Publius kept his money with his key in a small wash leather bag slung around his neck.

"There are honey cakes, skewers of cooked chicken and pork, herb dumplings, small sausages, wheat cakes, fruit (not a lot at this time of the year, though), in fact most of the things you would find in a Gesoriacum bath house." Looking around him appraisingly the optio admitted, "This land is becoming quite sophisticated."

For just a moment he assumed the stern features that the cadets had seen yesterday, "You realise that it will be up to you and young men like you to keep hold of it? There are a lot of greedy people in Gaul and Rome and Camelod is becoming a tempting prize."

Slightly embarrassed by the sudden turn in his conversation, they did nothing, but nod.

"Right. Well I'm hungry and thirsty. Follow me lads, there's a booth over here kept by a good friend - have you ever tasted fish sauce from Gades? Oh you should; thinly spread on pork and this man has a secret mixture of fine ground herbs that he dusts the roll with. Come along."

Dusk was falling when Publius led them out of the bath house. "You know what a ceilidh is? Yes, of course you do, but here in Cantodunon we have special houses for our ceilidhs. You bring along food and drink for yourself and to share, if we all put in one as each, that'll be sufficient. " They walked along the main street for a few paces, crossed over and went down the modest slope of the hillside, towards the river. There were more shops down here, all lighted by a torch at each end of the counter and they picked up a net for the food, a selection from a shop selling meat and sausages, bread and a half flagon of wine which they watered at the stall.

There was no mistaking the ceilidh house, it was almost square with three doors in the visible walls and in fact, in the two that were not in view to the optio and his cadets. Light

spilled out of them making geometric shadows of the gathering darkness, noise spilled out too - although to do justice it was music rather than simply noise.

"It's big isn't it?" Saith was impressed, back in old Derwenta anyone wanting to hold a ceilidh usually did it in the summer months, because it was impossible to gather more than ten or twelve neighbours under a roof unless you were a noble - and then a noble was probably not interested in holding a ceilidh! "So many doors?"

"In case of fire lad. There are two or three hundred people in there by now and although the fire is in a stone lined well in the centre of the room, Lord Gregory insists that we don't take chances." The optio took hold of Saith's elbow, "See just outside, a pool of water and a line of buckets hanging - just in case."

"It all seems very effective, Publius."

"We don't know lad. We've never had a fire, yet! It wouldn't surprise me if one night the fire watch set fire to it themselves, just for the practice." Publius was still shaking with laughter as he shepherded them into the ceilidh house, "Come, let us sit down." He indicated a bench off to the side of the gangway they stood in. "We're just in time, see. That plump lady over there in the centre of the room to the side of the fire pit. That's Margit, she's a story teller. She'll begin just as soon as the room settles down."

"Oh Gods!" Saith murmured to Galamos, "Fairy tales!", but he sat down with the others. Neighbours to left and right bade them good evening and offered titbits from the food they had brought with them. In turn the cadets offered from their net, but the flagon of watered wine they kept to themselves - there was not sufficient to pass around, besides most of the row seemed to be drinking beer or light mead. The noise was getting less now and loud whispers of "Hush, quiet there," gradually became more of a disturbance than the remaining conversations. And then it was truly quiet.

"There was a crooked little man who was old. So .. soo .. old that he had known the great grandparents of almost everyone in that village. A small village it was, nestling in a little valley high in the mountains of the old country to the west, where the sun sleeps and trees talked together at the centre of the holy grove, but the villagers never heard the trees talk nor yet seen where the sun slept behind stout shutters for they were afraid of the dark and of trees that talked. There now - how silly."

Margit waited for the laughter to die away again and for a moment wondered where the story was taking her, for she never knew in advance, she simply started talking and

carried on until the story came to an end. She wondered, sometimes what would happen if the story did **not** end, but that would be a story in itself.

"But the little man had seen the sun at sleep. He had walked though a cavern in the mountains to the west and there at the end of the cavern the ground fell away steep, so steep. And at the bottom, so far away that it seemed no larger than a fairy apple, lay the sun, resting on a black cloud in a field of brilliant flowers like stars. 'Ah, the poor dear is tired. All day he has travelled the earth, giving his warmth to the people and the animals and the flowers and the trees - and now is he tired. I wish I could get nearer,' he said to himself - poor dear, the old man often talked to himself - 'for I cannot see his face. Sure it must be a kind face, and now that he is tired and not shining brightly, I could see his features for sure.'

"So the little old man with his crooked back and his bent old legs and eyes that peered out from great bushes of brows, looked along the edge of the cavern mouth for a way down. And sure enough! There **was** a way down, a long way and a twisty way, but it led down to the soft black clouds that the sleeping sun rested on."

The only sound in that room was the clear voice of Margit the storyteller, the crackle of the logs in the fire pit and the occasional laughter that she teased from her audience. Saith was astonished to find that he was listening to every word of this silly story of an old man and his near death when the sun awoke and soared into the sky again as he got close. For a moment he broke the spell and looked around him. Every face was rapt, their imaginations caught by this simple woman who wove stories and told them in such a musical voice that he found himself hoping that she would carry on for hours yet. It was peaceful and exciting, humorous and sad too, she played the emotions of the audience like a great harp, jumping from the sonorous long strings to the lilting high notes, dwelling for a time in the middle with a captivating rythmn that took from neither extreme, but gave both a background for their brilliance. When the story eventually reached its surprising end - and Margit seemed as astonished as anyone else - his view of story tellers as entertainment had undergone a change and he resolved to visit the ceilidh house on his next eight day leave. It was late when they left, how late it was he had no idea, but he was uncomfortably aware that in only a few more hours he would be wakened by the horn and dragged out onto the parade ground. The two cadets said goodnight to Publius (he had other business that night in the town, it seemed) and quickly returned to the fortress by the eastern gate, reporting in to the guard house as they entered. Sleep came the instant they found their beds in the gloom of the shaded night light of the billet, despite the chorus of grumbles that met them.

Imbolc - February AD 43

Clarbre

In sixteen months, the new centre of druidism - in fact the first ever - had grown considerably. All six of the building complexes had been completed and the processional way running from east to west through the middle of the ring of woodland that surrounded the town, had been paved. Tall gates stood at the breaks in the walls that admitted the way to the sacred circle and carved stones lined the road for one hundred paces on either side. Overtopping everything stood the nemeton painted bright red. Not all the complexes were occupied, they were there to allow for growth, but there was accommodation for five hundred druids, bardoi and students and a teaching hall with eight great rooms. Two bath houses, the kitchens, communal dining halls and store rooms formed a single complex on the north side.

The complexes had different functions, but they all had the same frontage design. A concrete plinth gave two steps height from the central plaza to each complex, and columns carved from the trees cleared for the site, supported a simple pediment two hundred feet long and twenty feet deep. The pediment too, was of timber decorated with painted animals and twining vegetation. It was intended that the whole frontage would eventually be made of stone, but the effect was pleasing and imposing even as it was - and Brioc felt that wood was more fitting for the decoration of a druidic college. The separate buildings of each complex were approached through the porticos formed by the columns and pediments. They had the feel of Greek Agora, but were individually much smaller, of course.

The town already had a population of fifty students, a permanent 'staff' of twenty four druids, healers and bardoi and a temporary population of about three hundred men and women, that was increasingly becoming permanent. This was due to two factors, the first and most important was the growing influence of Rome. In the south east of Britain the Catuvelauni had been gradually expanding their kingdom - a movement that had been begun by King Cunoval, but which had accelerated in the last decade as his combative sons Caradoc and Togodumnos fought to increase their own influence within the kingdom. Cunoval had foreseen his son's ambition to increase their standing within the tribe and had seen a personal danger of assassination there. It was for that purpose (and the prospect of acquiring greater wealth from the two Roman refugees), that he had virtually created Windubro. His intention was that the small army of trained soldiers that Gregory and Lucius would build there would serve as a threat against his sons. Windubro had no alignment with any party of nobles in his kingdom and he was confident that the oath that Gregory and Lucius had sworn before leaving to establish the town, would assure him of their response if an assassination attempt was made. On close examination the scheme

revealed flaws, but there was no doubt that Windubro could form the core of a party of nobles who would object aggressively to the murder of the king. It seemed to have restricted the actions of the princes until first Caradoc and his brother had decided to make their own conquests and establish areas where only their word was law. It had to be said that Caradoc had been more successful than Togodumnos.

The conquests in the south east had left Camelod unaffected and the founding purpose almost forgotten. King Cunoval still ruled in his central kingdom and the princes continued to nibble at their neighbour's land acquisitively. What had not been foreseen, either at Windubro or amongst the ruling house of the Catuvellauni, was that the Kings and chieftains of the tribes that had lost land would, belatedly, remember the treaties of friendship signed with Julius Caesar. These treaties were three or four generations old and kings who were the great, great grandsons of the kings who had dealt with Caesar, made petitions to Rome for support against the encroachments of the Catuvellauni. A few had taken flight to Rome and made their petitions there supported by the war party of the Senate.

Various promises were made, gifts of gold and silver were disbursed (and promises extracted in return) and, although the invasion had not yet taken place one result of the undertakings Rome had demanded was being seen throughout the south already. This was a demand that the druids and their brethren be expelled from a small, but growing number of tribes. Rome hated the druids and had almost eradicated them in Gaul where they had been viewed by the authorities as fomenters of unrest and rebellion.

Although the Celts generally revered the druids, kings and chieftains had the support of the warrior class and nobles who believed that their interests would be best served by welcoming the Romans to their remaining lands. There had been no overt violence, but the druids had begun moving away from the fringes of the Catuvellauni lands - there had been no movement into Catuvellauni country because, although there was no hostility towards druids there, the druids themselves considered that it was King Cuneval's ambition, as well as that of his sons, that had led to their present troubles. The new town and college at Clarbri promised a haven.

The second attraction was that not only was Clarbri a haven, the permanent druidic college there, was promising a strengthening of the influence of druids. This sprang from the changes that were being argued in the college, changes that were bitterly opposed by some, but cautiously being welcomed by others. Druidism was not an organised religion, indeed it was hardly a religion at all, but an amalgum of teachings and ancient law that recognised the gods and, in addition to their prime function of seers and healers, provided

ceremonies and form to the worship of a pantheon. Two men had seen advantages in modifying this situation, Gregory had seen that the druids could be a substantial support and unifying force to his young country; Medoc had seen a means of increasing the power of the druids. Both men believed that their separate aims had a lot of common ground. In a series of meetings between the two, Gregory had made the point that although Rome had many Gods, the God of State was Jupiter - in several guises that had their basis in old traditions. The Hebrews on the other hand had a true monotheism. It was Gregory's argument that a great deal of the unity of Rome was due to the paramount God of State, Jupiter. Further than that, the worship of the God of the Jews, was the only thing that held **that** nation together. Over much more than a thousand years, the Jews had been, at various times, empire builders, victims, powerful kingdoms and victims again. Now they were scattered throughout the known world - there had been a large population of Jews in Alexandria, men and women of influence. And the same was true of many cities. Ironically, it was only in the Jewish provinces that had been independant kingdoms, or client kingdoms a few decades ago, that they caused trouble.

Despite this apparent diffusion, the Hebrew people remained a nation and exerted a quiet, but powerful influence on the world about them. The only thing that held them together in this fashion was, in Gregory's opinion, monotheism and the worship of their God Yahweh. Similar arguments in favour of monotheism could be found amongst the Greek philosophers whose writings had formed a large part of his education.

It was an argument that had an appeal for Medoc and over the months of their communications and meetings he came to embrace the idea of a single druidic God - with a minor role for a reduced pantheon of Celtic Gods, rather in the Roman fashion, but with a more authoritative position for Lugh - the God that Medoc considered the most influential.

Medoc's main motives were probably political, as the oldest man in Britain he had grown a little cynical about the power of Gods, but he had the will and the skills to persuade others. Brioc was easily persuded, that this form of monotheism could formulate a recognisable druidic religion and give the druids an authority in Britain that recent events proved did not exist in the present time. In consequence Clarbri was staffed by men and women who accepted this view and who inculcated the students to it.

It was not difficult to achieve this with young minds, but Medoc felt that it was necessary to convert (if that was the word) druids and bardoi who came to Clarbri for shelter. Brioc had achieved a great step towards achieving this aim by persuading the man who was acknowledged as the greatest bardoi and harpist of the age, that the worship of Lugh as the God of State was logical and would imbue the druidic college with a strength it had

never owned before. Meriadoc was of the old Goidel Celts from the far south west, but eschewed the darker side of their old practices, preferring those of the Brythonic Celts. Nevertheless he could recite the genealogy of most of the old kings of western Britain for fifty five generations. His fund of stories recording the great deeds of chieftains and heroes was unsurpassed by any other bardoi and his knowledge of the tangled skeins of prophesy was remarkable. It was the last two virtues that commended him to Brioc, for with his acceptance of the new aims of the college he was in a position to fortify those aims by his choice of songs. Not that he would falsify anything, that would be to deny his whole training, but there was plenty in the prophesies that, without changing a word or an emphasis, would serve Brioc's purpose admirably - and well chosen heroic deed could put gloss upon it. If Brioc felt at all uncomfortable with this ploy he never showed it and Meriadoc sang and recited his support of the new druidism serenely and beautifully. As he did now.

Imbolc was most important to the Celtic calendar for it hailed the springing of plant and animal life. In all the towns and settlements of Camelod pregnant ewes would be blessed and prayers would be offered to Mother Earth before the furrows were scored in the tilled soil for the seed. All the Celts' hopes for a bountiful crop of grain and livestock were expressed in the ceremonies in the fields, but here at Clarbri there were no fields. There was a gathering of priests, seers, bardoi and ordinary people at the eastern end of the processional way. Brioc led the way garbed in a white robe with embroidered ivy vines and wood roses and a shallow crown of oak leaves upon his head, behind him Meriadoc strolled playing and singing the tale of Arto the king of the old land of Camelod, but this was not the mournful story of his cozening and downfall, this was the bright and hopeful dawn of Camelod - and there were new verses added that all the student bardoi were taking note of. Just as the sheep and cattle and grain fields were praised and complimented on their beauty - and begged to be generous and fecund in the months to come, so he praised Lugh as the all powerful God of Camelod and besought him to smile on his people. Nothing like this had been heard before in Britain. It had little to do with the old practice of druidism - and everything to do with the quasi-monotheism that was being pursued.

The music was glorious and a chorus had been devised that was easy for the lay devotees to follow as the bardoi sang its first round. The procession entered the gates and wound around the nematon with the pole on their right hand side. It was not a long procession and soon all were assembled in the circle of closely grazed grass. Brioc waited until the sun was at its highest and then offered up a prayer with the lighting of a fire of pine boughs and applewood. There were no animal sacrifices as there would have been in Rome. Lugh forbade the spilling of blood in his ceremonies - the Celts were still unfamiliar

Celtic Empire - Camelod

with the concept of a sacrifice of fragrant smoke accompanied by song, but it satisfied them and when the ceremony was completed and Brioc dismissed them with a blessing, they dispersed, fully confident that the God of Camelod was pleased with his people. Brioc had spent the previous year teaching the revolutionary idea that Lugh was not a God who needed to be appeased, but who took pleasure in the industry, wealth and happiness of his people. Soon it would be necessary to speak of a covenant between the people and their God.

Brioc watched them go. This was the first of the new ceremonies held at Clarbri and he felt that it had gone very well. The State religion of Lugh had been inaugurated in a very fitting atmosphere - he felt happy with the day.

Chapter Sixteen

Cantodunon March 43 AD

The news from New Derwenta was good, two infantry cohorts had been formed from the recruits who had spent twelve months in training. During that time they had battle experience against some small Brigante settlements to the north, not strong enough to risk serious casualties, but bloody enough to get them used to actually using the swords they had carried for a year. Gregory spent a moment thinking of what revelations that had brought to the recruits, apart from relief at the lightness of a steel sword as compared with the wooden ones that they practised with every day until their arms creaked, he could sympathise with the physical sickness most must have felt at the first thrust into flesh. He remembered that first shock well, first the amazement that he was unharmed and then the sight of the blood on the virgin steel and the awareness of what he had just done. It passed of course, but that first time left a scar that merely hardened - it never disappeared. New Derwenta was now only short of one cohort for a full legion. At the same time the two cohorts of heavy cavalry, one of light cavalry and a ballista cohort of one hundred and twenty ballista gave the fortress an effective strength well in excess of a Roman legionary fortress. As in Windubro and Cantodunon, the fortress housed wives and children too, giving it a total population of nearly ten thousand adults, the result of attracting the previously scattered population from a radius of about twenty miles.

It was now clear that prior to the coastal raids this area had supported a large number of settlements. According to accounts from the older men and women, the depredations of the raiders had begun two generations ago and over the years, the settlements that had attracted them had dispersed to individual farms scattered further inland. Derwenta had been the last to survive and no one had any explanation for that being spared until recently.

As New Derwenta grew, Old Derwenta had shrunk, but in doing so had lost the bothies, the tumbledown workshops and most of the remaining houses had been replaced by modern houses of timber and concrete and stone, arranged neatly in a curvilinear approximation to a grid. There were no defensive walls, even ineffective as the old ones had been. The population was probably only slightly over two thousand, but it was a pleasant residential town with a small forum with shops and administrative offices housing five clerks. It was a town of moderately wealthy people in the main.

Commercially the region was doing at least as well as expected, a wealth of small rivers and streams running from the northern high lands promoted a rapid growth of waterwheels, some of them being run by the legion as the cohorts rotated their duties. The workshops and watermills scattered along the seven major streams that had sufficient flow

of water to feed the mills in summertime, now had wide roads paved in proper fashion linking the groups of factories and watermills, leading down to Derwentside and its small riverside wharfs. Over to the east another road of normal two-wagon width had begun to wind its way to the coast and Brido.

The clay in the area was particularly good and the wheels that were not grinding grain for people and livestock were puddling clay, stamping platters and blowing the kilns. Quite by accident, an over blown kiln had produced a crude glaze. Aiden had caught the product before the incensed owner of the kiln had destroyed it and sent it off to Cantodunon and Heron's workshops. Experimentation was proceeding now with the intention of producing a competitor to the expensive glazed wares of the empire. What Gregory found most gratifying about the affair was that Aiden had obviously picked up his own habit of wandering unannounced into both military and civil areas. Who knew what might grow from the result of that one small incident?

Platters were all stamped using the power of the waterwheels, but no means of speeding the making of the deeper products of the potters' wheels had been found. All the same, making puddling and blowing a task for machines instead of men had improved the rate of production. Two cohorts were kept on roadmaking and tree felling, but as yet there was no spare board for export. The needs of both Derwentas and the building of a dredger for the embryo port of Brido saw to that - and when the dredger was finished, there would be warehouses, additional jetties and a breakwater to construct. On the hill above the port a fortlet had been added on the reverse side of the hill and out of sight from the sea. It was garrisoned by two centuries - one of infantry and one of cavalry and equipped with a signal tower that marked the eastern end of a chain that now reached south to Cantodunon and west to Ebor. If pirates should descend upon the coast again, they would have an unpleasant surprise. A disguised lookout position had been built into the hillside from the local stone so that, as well as providing comfortable housing for a century, it had all the appearance of an outcropping of stone.

The legion and town council had decided that it would be more rewarding to capture the raiders and their ships than simply give them a bloody nose. With reasonable luck marauders would capture the docks and head immediately for the old town in the expectation of catching the tribe unaware and undefended. Their previous experience would not have left an impression of a people who could put up any sort of resistance. The lookout was manned permanently by town guards in the charge of a regular legionary centurion.

A busy year at the Derwentas, but a peaceful one. Along the Ouse and Ure the settlements had been fortified and linked by signals without provoking any major attacks from the Brigantes. Indeed the only violence along this border was created by Camelod as it raided north and west to keep the tribes there peaceful, while recruiting of citizens and legionaries brought in fresh men and women from lands as far as fifty miles away. In fact although Gregory knew roughly what the intake had been it was high time that a census was taken of both population and of the commercial possibilities of the land that they now controlled.

Despite the dictates of the calendar, Gregory always thought of the first days of spring as being the new year. It gave a variable start to the year, since it depended upon the vagaries of weather, but then - why not? Gregory's musings and review of the past twelve months, had been initiated by Myrcal. She was pregnant again - which made a family of five children now, or at least it would in October with good fortune. So far as child bearing was concerned, Camelod was fortunate indeed. Almost everywhere he looked he saw pregnant women with children. The census last year of the two towns and all settlements had found a total of fifty five thousand adults and twenty two thousand children below the age of five with child deaths fewer than thirteen in a hundred. Camelod's fecundity exceeded that of any other tribe or nation that they knew of in Britain - in Gregory's opinion that was due almost entirely to housing, diet and living conditions. Not one citizen in Camelod was required to work the full daylight hours and pregnant women in their seventh month were limited theoretically to household tasks. He did not suppose for an instant that would figure in Myrcal's idea of what she should be doing; as he recalled, she had held a long meeting with traders from the lower Rhine just three days before Litabel was born and was more than a little caustic when he attempted to end the meeting at dusk.

He was convinced that Camelod would easily attain the goal he had set of a population of one hundred thousand men, women and children within another two or three years. In ten years after that the adult population would probably have doubled. A very respectable achievement for a nation that was only ten years old now. Of course that was not allowing for refugees when the Romans landed. They must prepare themselves for that most likely event, by clearing settlement sites in areas that needed development and developing a larger reserve of building materials. It was just as well that the production and sales of cast iron tools and furnishings had swollen so hugely in twelve months, because what had been their mainstay for six years, the sale of cut boards, had been restricted greatly by their own expansion. As it was, the value of exports had more than doubled and imports of grain could probably be reduced this year because of the new land brought to the plough in the Ouse and Derwent settlements. Lucius had informed him that there was grazing and oat fields sufficient for at least ten thousand horses in the new lands. If Rome would hold

off for another two years, Camelod would be unassailable. In fact, given the number of Roman agents in the country (according to their own intelligence arm) it was always possible that Rome would decide that the enterprise would be too expensive and forget it altogether. Peace was a great deal more to be desired than the successful repulsion of an invader.

Although there were decent roads or trackways around those new territories now (many more miles of trackways than roads, but they had all been improved by the legion and were quite capable of light traffic), it occurred to Gregory that he had not seen any of it. Even more importantly, none of the settlements had seen him yet and it was important that those tens of thousands of new citizens and proto-citizens should have a focus for their loyalty. Religion, oaths and self-interest were strong motives, but a 'royal' progress would intensify it - and the garrisons of Windubron and Cantodunon troops deserved to have their service recognised. There were standards to present, awards in the form of gilded phalerae to be pinned to chests. No oak or grass crowns to award yet, but that would come. Although he and Lucius had simplified Roman martial ranks and practices, the full range of awards for valour and exceptional competence were being introduced.

Yes, definitely a progress was called for and this peaceful period was exactly right for it. He would talk it over with Myrcal tonight - Heron reported that the new travelling cart was both swift and comfortable on even mediocre road surfaces. They could make a holiday of it, accompanied by a century of heavy cavalry and a couple more carts to carry tents and food. He unconsciously stroked the almost absent hair on his head, "Yes, she'd enjoy that."

Windubro March 43 AD

Lucius was an early riser, it was a habit that the army had established years ago and one that he had never been tempted to modify. Nevertheless, he was not accustomed to messengers knocking on the door of his private apartments before his servant had finished shaving him. An early riser yes, but nearly always a bad tempered one and the messenger delivered the note from the signal station atop the principia, with trepidation. He knew what it said of course, he had been in the station as the semaphore transmission was decoded into brief, but clear language. "Venutius located. Large army and town. Despatch follows."

Lucius read it twice - which was hardly necessary, the legion was well schooled in sending unambiguous signals, sat down again and lifted his face for a fresh layer of lather. The silence grew a little oppressive and the messenger shuffled his feet. Eventually the scrape and slap of the razor removing beard and then being plunged into the hot water bowl

came to a finish. Lucius's face was wiped and dried and he stood up, thanked the servant and suddenly broke into a broad smile, "Ha! We've got the bugger at last."

Slapping his hands together, he addressed himself to the messenger, "The signal's already been relayed to Cantodunon of course? ... Good, tell the signals optio that the despatch is to be copied as soon as it arrives and sent down river by fast boat. As soon as that is done I want the despatch, Septimus Causta and the staff in the map room."

He stroked his chin, favouring the sore places and considering yet again the benefits of growing a beard. Returning to the business in hand he enquired, "The message says nothing about the time the despatch was sent off?"

He sniffed as the messenger shook his head, "Damn. It's about time that ..." A rap at the door announced another messenger from the principia signals office, "Yes?"

Another wax tablet was passed over and two messengers stood nervously in front of him, "Well, that's better, 'Despatch expected to arrive in the third hour.'... so why didn't they say so before, eh?"

"It's the same transmission, Lord. I brought the first part as soon as it was written, because the optio thought it important."

"Oh! Well yes, so it was my boy, so it was. Off with you now and remember, despatch and staff meeting in the map room as soon as it arrives."

"Yes Lord." Speaking in chorus the two saluted, turned smartly on their heels and with a little confusion at the doorway, left the room. Lucius shook his head and murmured, "Good lads though. Give 'em another year and they'll get through that door neatly." and he chuckled. His mood had changed completely. He wandered over to the window, one of the few glazed in Windubro and gazed over the town. It would be another hour at least before the sun lifted over the high ground and burnt away the mist, but he liked it like this, with the bustle of starting a new day concealed beneath the soft mantle. The appearance of the walls and watchtowers above the mist appealed to a romantic streak in his soul too - although he would never admit it.

Venutius at last, what **had** the bugger been doing all this time? Whatever it was, he had had a good four years and more to do it in and Lucius was sure that the prince had not returned to Brigante country. That much intelligence they had received. Lucius strongly suspected that Venutius had been preparing revenge against Camelod. Well with luck the

despatch would clear up a lot of the uncertainty, in the meantime ... breakfast and then a brisk walk about the fortress to make sure that everybody was up to the mark.

He turned away from the window, "Right! I'll have breakfast now and I'll have my dress uniform ready. No armour though, leather cuirass, dress mantle and long sleeved tunic." Both he and Gregory had adopted long sleeved tunics for winter wear - it was more sensible and gave the opportunity to bear a wide purple stripe from shoulder to cuff. Not Roman by any means, but then he no longer considered himself Roman and, as Lord General of Camelod, he certainly had the right to a purple stripe.

The despatch arrived more or less when expected, the fast boats were capable of covering ten or twelve miles of river in an hour downstream, five to six miles an hour upstream. Seven officers were present in the map room: - Lucius, Caionac (tribune now and fortress commander at Windubro since Aiden's return to Cantodunon); Caroc, primus of infantry in Dungan's absence; Kearhal, primus of cavalry; Jossoc, primus of artillery; Tutir, centurion of signals at headquarters, a Greek clerk, Antoninus who headed the commissariat and Septimus Causta, tribune in charge of officer training. In addition there were two servants, three scribes and two messengers.

"Gentlemen." Lucius stood up and gestured to one of the scribes to distribute the copies of the despatch, "What you see before you is a despatch from a century fortlet in the iron workings on the right bank of the Severn at Aricona, (let me add that this is where we obtain our best iron for steel). As you read it you will see that a scout patrol caught sight of a body of Brigante who were obviously returning from observing our activities up and down the Severn. Since they had not been seen themselves our scouts followed the Brigante as they made their way west." He paused, "I have not read all the report myself yet - that's just the preamble, so let us all get to work. You can see cups and flagons before you - it's safely watered, and the servants will bring around food. We're going to be here some time." He sat down himself and took a round of flat bread, slices of pork, a chicken thigh and some fruit from the tray held out to him.

It was a detailed report on four folio pages of thin parchment made in the Windubron factory - quite distinctive from the hand beaten parchment that had been the only writing material apart from imported papyrus for years. It had two important advantages over papyrus - it could be scraped clean and reused more often than papyrus and it was smoother, so that writing was clearer and more compact.

Close to half an hour passed, in reading and short conversations between neighbours around the table and then Lucius called the meeting to order.

"You've got as much meat out of it as you're going to get - and I have to say there is a fair bit there to digest." He turned to Septimus, "You're the most experienced man here tribune. Would you start by summing up what we have and then outline what our first steps should be in planning an attack - because, of course, we will be attacking, I suspect it won't be as easy as last time. Venutius appears to be a man who learns." Sitting down again he raised his cup to his lips and gazed over the rim as Septimus Causta stood.

"General, gentlemen. The situation is clear, our scouts followed the Brigantes as far as they could and were then spotted by another group and had to retreat. However, by then, with what they had observed and what they learned from locals, they knew that Venutius had captured a small settlement around gold mines in the valley of the Cothi (a river sixty miles to the west of Ariconia, the report says), and has now transformed it into a fortified town. The locals estimate that he has between four and five and a half thousand warriors billeted in and around the town - which I suppose we could call Cothi."

There was no objection - why should there be? Septimus continued to outline the situation, "He has increased the output of gold by the simple expedient of taking slaves and working them to death. It requires a constant supply and this is obtained by his warriors raiding for twenty or thirty miles around, and up and down the coast, which is less than twenty miles away. A constant flow of warriors and their men of war flows in from his supporters in Brigantia.

"According to an informant (what sort of 'informant', I wonder?), only scouts were allowed to travel further than thirty mile east of Cothi, to avoid contact with us. I imagine that will change now. There have been Roman envoys, gifts of gold from Rome and, judging from the description of rudimentary drill performed by some of the warriors at least, someone has been advising on modern military tactics. In short, Venutius has an army again, a large one, which is being trained to a certain degree - and he is wealthy with gold from Rome and from the mines. We might consider that he is intending to take his place again in Brigantia, but that seems most unlikely. He is a proud man and we have rubbed his face in the dirt twice - I believe that this build up of strength is aimed directly at us. Our planning should take into account these facts:

he is aware of our weapons and techniques, he is a cunning general and won't fall into the same traps as before; that he has up to date intelligence of Windubro; he may well have instilled discipline into a large part of his forces, and finally that we do not have the

element of surprise - if anything it is ourselves who have been surprised, but not in any disastrous way. That is my view of the matter, General and gentlemen." Septimus, sat down, leaned back in his chair and proceeded to get on with his meal while he listened to the next, contribution.

"One thing you have not mentioned Septimus Causta and that is that the optio in charge of the scouts is one of the first batch out of your training. I believe he has performed very creditably, I congratulate you and suggest that the lad deserves a promotion."

"I agree Lord, thank you."

Most of a chicken thigh was ingested by Lucius before he spoke again - a deliberate indication that this meeting was not to be taken in haste. When he had finished his last mouthful he said as much, "We will be warring with Venutius before long, but he will not be attacking Windubro again and I doubt that he will come within twenty miles of us - even so that gives him plenty of scope. We have plenty of time - well enough time anyway - to prepare for him. Before tribune Caionac gives us the total strength here in Windubro (and I'm fairly sure that is what all those quiet conversations were about), I'll have Duor the master smith sent for. I know he has been working on notes and suggestions that Heron has sent upriver from Cantodunon. Messenger! Master Duor, if you please, and smartly lad, smartly." A nod to Caionac brought the tribune to his feet.

"General and gentlemen. I've been making notes and the total force at the fortress is: three thousand infantry, one thousand six hundred cavalry, ninety six mobile ballistas and one thousand recruits. A total of almost five thousand trained men and one thousand half trained." The information had been read off a wax tablet and now he picked up another and resumed, "However, that is not all. Without calling back any of our men from the forts on the Brigante border or New Derwenta, we can add to this army by calling in troops on garrison duty in seven small settlements and, if we start our attack from the Severn, by picking up more from Severnside and Riverdown. We have trained about a quarter of the recruits up to the point at which they can be used in the left wing cohort in a standard formation, not good, but promising. There is one more thing. Tribune Aiden has returned to Cantodunon and from correspondence we have had in the last few weeks, I learned that he has trained five hundred lads, armed with the steel, handheld ballista that Heron developed last year. Aiden calls them light cavalry and I believe they are battle ready."

Pausing he took a last look at his tablets, checking the figures, "I make that a total of seven cohorts of infantry, two cohorts of cavalry, one of light cavalry and one hundred and twenty mobile ballista - almost seven thousand men - and boys."

Most of the men laughed at that and Caionac waved a finger at them, "No don't laugh. Aiden says that they are very effective in mock battles and he sees no reason why their tactics should fail in actual warfare. Apparently they are not subjected to any pressures during combat. They act as gadflies, sweeping in to the range of their weapons, discharging them and then galloping off again. Oh yes, one more thing, they are using small hill ponies which can manage on grazing alone - something our wagonmasters will be grateful for. We will be supplying rations for nearly two and half thousand horses, as it is."

As he sat down the majordomo announced the arrival of master Duor. He was a lean man, slightly bowed from spending almost a lifetime bending over an anvil; his long face showed none of the intelligence that the man had displayed liberally since he had first come to Windubro as one of the original settlers. A very competent smith and an inventive one, once his creative spirit had been given free rein. In the first year or two of Windubro's foundation Gregory had often been surprised by the intelligence of men and women who had been simply dismissed as peasants by the Coritani nobles who had virtually owned them. It did not surprise him now and Heron's transference to Britain had accelerated the effect.

"You needed me Lord Lucius?" That very phrase indicated Duor's view of his value, 'needed' not 'wanted', expressed the smith's assessment of the situation.

Lucius's lips twitched, Duor was approaching fifty now and something of a 'character' about the town. "Yes Duor. I know that you have been developing fire weapons. Would you tell us about them - we will have a use for them very shortly if they are reliable?"

The long face slowly developed a wolfish smile, "Ah. Well that's welcome news Lord, I'd thought we might be wasting our time there." Visibly arranging the order of his thoughts, Duor let a few moments pass before going on. "Master Heron, sent his cannisters of fire last year. The ones that they were using on shipboard and which burst into flames when they break on an enemy's deck. Trouble is they did the same if you dropped them on your own deck. Very embarrassing! Anything we made use of, would be for them bouncy little ballistas the artillery use and I could see them setting fire all over the place."

He began to pace back and forth over a short distance close to the table and there was a shuffling of chairs as officers changed position to avoid cricking their necks, "Now, years ago when I was making charcoal in the hill country using pine logs, I found something very strange. I used to cover the vent of the pile with an old plate or iron - it was easy to slide

about and adjust the gap. Well one day my helper, a heavy footed man, had stumbled when finishing off the turf and clay around the vent, and left a deep footprint in it. When I inspected the vent on the second day burn that footprint was full of liquid. It wasn't water, but very strong smelling. It didn't seem to be doing any harm there, but I mopped it up anyway with a bundle of old rags and tossed it to one side. I'm a tidy man, can't abide rubbish lying about the place."

Those officers that knew his habits stifled guffaws, Duor's idea of tidying up consisted of sweeping the desiderata of his forge about the place until it reached the hardened slopes of similar rubbish against the foot of his workshop walls.

"I found the smell irritating - and it didn't sit well with my meal that night so I slung the bundle into the cooking fire and nearly lost my eyebrows - I've never seen such a flare up. Well, that was some years ago, but I remembered it when we had Heron's fire cannisters some months back - and I made a load of pine charcoal and collected this stuff off of the top of the pile when it was into its second day. It burns more easily than olive oil - much fiercer and the smell makes your eyes water too; soak it into a wick and put a live flame to it (same if you soak earth and leaves with it) and it flares up, it softens that pitch that Heron had brought over from the lands around the middle sea so you can waterproof vats and water channels easily - and the medics are using it now for something or other.

"Anyway, what interests me is its burning quality. I puzzled for a long time on how to shoot it from the ballistas and then it came to me that if we made hollow shafts of wood for the bolts, with an iron dart plugging the hole, we could fill them with this fire water and when it hit a shield, or a man, or the ground, the tube would split and squirt the liquid out, soaking the area." There was a momentary hesitation, "It didn't work too well at first and then I realised that it needed something to force the liquid out of the tube - it was not being ejected by its' own weight. Now we put a small slug of iron into the tube first, then the fire water and finally grease a bolt and plug the hole with it. It works fine and will spray the stuff for ten feet and more beyond the shield."

"Can't you think of a better name for it than 'fire water' or 'stuff' Duor?" The question was Lucius's and it stopped Duor's flow for a moment or two while he thought about it.

"Well Lord, it is the product of turning wood into charcoal so why not call it 'aboroleum', the latin words for tree and oil?"

"Seems reasonable. Yes. So the arboroleum is spread all over whatever is behind the shield?"

"Yes, Lord.... Then of course we need to set fire to it! Mind you the stuff's so pungent that it makes you weep anyway, so it's already an effective weapon, but I wanted fire. Master Heron showed me a drawing of the catapult that the Romans use - an onager - it's a small version of the battlement catapults the watch towers use at night to send bales of flaming straw into the air. So we built one of those on a mobile's platform and now after soaking the enemy with - arboroleum, a couple of flaming straw balls gives them a lot to think about. Oh yes!" He nodded his head in satisfaction and waited.

Every man around the table could easily visualize the effect of this new weapon, it might be a little clumsy because of the need to synchronise ballistas and onagers, but if it worked it would be a terribly effective way of destroying the integrity of an army. Simple fire balls of pitch and straw were only useful against a fortification or camp - an army in the field could see them coming and dodge, but if Duor was right, this weapon arrived with the speed of a bolt and sprayed over a wide area, waiting for ignition to reveal the true horror. It was probably less effective if the enemy was moving forward, but if they were static and building up their confidence for a charge ... ! Caionac was thinking further ahead though, sooner or later their weapons would be copied - tactics would be needed to neutralise the weapons effect - it could be done, he could see that, but it was going to make battlefield decisions more complicated some time in the future.

"There is another thing, Lord. Jossoc asked me if our ballista bolts could pierce a triple wall of shields if an enemy combined the shields of the first three ranks and held them in place with the men braced one behind the other."

The practice of bracing the front line to withstand the shock of an enemy charge was a Roman tactic the infantry had often practised, but fortifying the shields by backing them one behind the other was new. Lucius put their thoughts into words, "A good idea Jossoc, I have to admit it hadn't occurred to me, but, in the heat of battle, a inventive commander without artillery might think of it." The artillery tribune tried to look modest, but hardly succeeded.

"Sa! I know that a small heavy dart will pass more easily through thick shields than a large heavy one, but over a distance it would tend to 'tumble' in the air, lose speed and effectiveness. Since we had already used a composite dart for the fire water, I had thin spear points made - they were as broad as your little finger, sharp and a foot long - and we grease them and fit them fairly loosely into wooden shafts - and for a bit of added punch we do the same as for the incendiary bolts - a half pound slug of iron is greased and dropped to the bottom of the hole. They don't have quite the range of a solid iron bolt,

but as soon as they strike a shield the wooden shaft stops, still giving a shock and the dart is struck by the slug of iron and given a bit more impetus." Duor paused to get the full effect of his next words, "We can pierce a hand's width of pine at seventy yards and the dart and the slug do quite a bit of damage. Almost as much damage as the big wall mounted ballistas. "

The surprised exclamations that this brought, transformed Duor's intent features into a broad smile. "I thought that might please you Jossoc."

The primus of artillery was a big man, reputedly strong enough to wind one of his ballista by simply drawing back the cord by hand, his craggy face was not well adapted to display the pleasure this news gave him, but his words were. "It certainly does, Duor, two new weapons. And Venutius has no inkling of them."

"Yes," Lucius was quick to draw their attention to what their enemy knew of Camelod's forces, "that is a point to bear in mind. Venutius is a cunning and able general. He has rebuilt an army when we thought that we had destroyed him, has apparently instilled some discipline in a class of men who are notoriously undisciplined and established an effective scouting system. We can count on him having thought about the tactics we employed last time and to have found some sort of counter to them. That is something that we must discuss later today, but now, unless there is something that you wish to ask our Mastersmith Good! Well Duor, our thanks for your gifts, please set as many men as you can to producing the new weapons; we are expecting to fight the Brigante in the next twenty or thirty days."

The sudden presentation of this programme of production made no obvious effect on the elderly smith, he simply nodded his head and after a brief "Goodbye Lord." left the room.

"The next thing to see to, is fodder and other supplies. Antoninus this is your department. How are our granaries? Can we supply this army for about twenty days in the field?"

A very clerly clerk, Antoninus looked like a plump dormouse. Less than five feet tall and wearing a long tunic that ballooned out to a girth almost equal to his height, the Greek nevertheless displayed a bright, intelligent gaze and his speech came quickly and neatly off the tongue in almost perfect British.

"We will need some shipments from Cantodunon as far as rations and fodder are concerned gentlemen, but there are sufficient sets of scale armour for the cavalry and ballista men for battlefield replacement, lorica segmenta for the infantry and, I understand

from tribune Caionac that the light cavalry will have all their own weapons and whatever armour is needed..?"

"That's correct Antininus, they simply wear an iron skull cap and carry a light gladius on the left of their saddles."

"Thank you tribune. We can certainly expect to receive additional supplies in the next ten days even if Cantondunon has to order imports, we have excellent reserves in the two towns and the settlements along the Trent. Might I suggest that you request two or three more teams of medicos? Cantodunon can spare them I know and you will be more active in the west than they will be in Brigante country in the east."

"A good point. Yes we will certainly be more active, as you put it. Put it in hand please after talking with the tribunes at the end of the meeting. I think that it is very likely that when we finish this conference, we will have decided to split our forces into two or even three arms."

Both tribunes raised their eyebrows at this, but said nothing, Septimus simply nodded in agreement.

It was dusk when the meeting finished, but the details of the proposed invasion of the land around the Cothi were as complete as they could be before hostilities began. Officers, scribes and clerk were dismissed holding wax tablets listing a full load of work and organisation for the next few days. Lucius stood on the stone portico and watched them go off to their own quarters, with a strong sense of achievement. Their first real battle against an organised foe was approaching and his young army staff were dealing with it in a very professional manner. Battle itself was a different matter of course, but he had no real doubts on that score. He took a deep breath of the cold evening air and with a spring in his stride, quickly covered the few yards to the praesidium and his own home.

Just three days later another message arrived from the Severn, it came by semaphore and it was very brief.

"Riverdown sacked by Venutius. Severnside safe."

"What is the source of this message?"

"Severnside, General." The messenger would like to get out quickly before the Lord Lucius exploded, he had never seen him look so grim.

"Right. And it has been forwarded to Lord Gregory, of course?"

"Oh yes, General."

Lucius softened his expression a little, he had had no intention of frightening the lad - he was barely fourteen from the look of him, "Good. Now you can get back down to the Legion Admin. and tell them that there will be a staff meeting in ten minutes. The same staff as before. Got that?" He got a nod. "Good lad, off you go - and no running in the Praesidium, d'you hear?"

Musing, he watched the boy leave the room barely seeming to open the door before squeezing through, as though he wanted as little evidence of his presence and now, absence, as possible. "Blast Venutius. Damn the bugger to Hades without a water bottle - he's got his blow in first. Well, it's his last success and Lugh willing," Lucius had made a rapid conversion to the new, druidic ideas of State religion, "... it will be his second to last battle." When the door opened this time it was with fervour - and it slammed to behind him with a crash that echoed through his living quarters. Lucius was on his way to the maproom and his staff meeting.

"Gentlemen, as you know now, Venutius has sacked or taken Riverdown. Whether he has indeed taken it as the message states, or burnt it down is something we must wait to learn. Now take your seats and I'll give you my first thoughts on this.

"I believe he has taken the town, not burnt it and I think that for two reasons. One, it has valuable mines and ironworks which we developed, but not, thank God, the cast iron furnaces. Two, by all reports he has been getting civilised and he will want something to reward his warriors with that will keep them in place instead of running off up country to boast. Three, probably the most important in his mind, to goad us into attacking him and trying to take it back. He has left Severnside alone so that we can use that as a base for our response. Venutius wishes to keep the initiative, and force us along a path of his choosing.

"It follows then, that the last thing we would do is go tearing down the Severn to throw him out of the town. Remember that there will be ballista there and we know he has Roman

advisors, he could pin us down nicely around the town and then, if he is quick, attack us with the rest of his army while we are in extended formation around the walls. He has to be quick because whoever his advisor is, will recognise that those walls will not keep an organised army out, even with decent artillery, for more than a few hours. So his army - the rest of it - will be within five or six miles and to left or right of our expected line of march. It has to arrive smartly and fit to fight immediately."

With a grin he went on, "That's my say. I'm going to sit down now and give the floor to Tribune Septimus Causta."

Causta raised his eyebrows, it was the briefest address that the tribune had ever heard from a General facing a problem of this magnitude.

"Thank you General. I have to admit that I agree with you. Venutius knows our army, the Roman does not and despite anything that the prince has told him, he will think of us as barbarians with a gloss of military skills - and Venutius a barbarian easily impressed by a little organisation. A simple ploy like this should be sufficient to gull a barbarian army, surely? The first thing that I would say, however, is this. We must get patrols into the land to the north of Venutius to reconnoitre the valleys running roughly north and south - which is what our map indicates." A stubby, soldier's fist pointed at the bull hides covered with information of the rivers, landmarks, towns and settlements of Camelod and its neighbours - as far as they were known.

"They should take some of Heron's pigeons with them. At that distance messages will reach the pigeon coop here in four hours or less. Venutius might well begin eliminating the signal posts now that the first message to draw us out, has been delivered."

"You're right Septimus! Clerk, nip out into the office and have pigeons that are 'homed' on Windubro, fed and prepared for travelling." Having attended to that matter Lucius settled back and waved for the tribune to carry on.

"We are already mobilising for the attack on Venutius, of course, so the business of assembling men and materiel is largely being tackled, but I think that we should use our army in three parts." His fingers marked them on the palm of his left hand.

"First. A small, noisy group of wagons, infantry and cavalry. Their purpose is to take the direct road from Severn Station down towards Severnside. A screen of cavalry must remove any of Venutius's scouts that get close enough to count the force, and the main body must travel back and forth along the road progressing in Venutius's direction by no

more than one mile every hour. At night they will make camp, set up tents for about six thousand men - that's what most of the wagons are needed for - and light cooking fires to match. They must still be vigilant and ensure that the Brigantes have no idea that this is a decoy. About four hundred men should achieve this. Timing is important. They should arrive at Severnside at about the time that our other groups are ready. With care, the wagons can be used to mask the movement of men from the front of the column to the rear - I don't see how they can possibly imitate six thousand, but by then Venutius should be convinced of the numbers - we will be doing what he expected of us - and simply making the numbers appear 'a lot' should do the job.

"My suggestion is that the other two groups will start down the Severn road, but strike off to the west after about ten or fifteen miles. According to the map there is a ford or a ferry somewhere on the upper Severn - the surveyors will sort that out. It is at this point that the decoy group will need to start their operation. Any observation up to this point by Venutius's spies would be a bonus, but that is in the lap of the Gods. From then on his scouts must not be allowed to get a close look. This body will divide into a small section and a larger one, the small section thrusting west to Cothi, the large one veering towards a point west of Riverdown. There is a ridge of high hills running parallel with the river that will conceal this army from whatever awaits out men on the expected route along the Severn road. After the split, the two groups heading west should operate in concert with the decoy, synchronised by local messengers to begin with and then with the pigeons homed on Windubro and fast messengers from here. The west bound groups will not be making a road that will allow fast messengers, but if the initiative for timing comes from the second group, the Severn road will ensure that they can work in concert - and then it is possible that they will be able to maintain sufficient contact with the force aimed at Cothi to roughly synchronise that attack.

Caionac interrupted, "By your leave tribune - with our knowledge of the area so sparse, survey and communication is, as you say of paramount importance. We could speed up the messengers if, in addition to our groups establishing post houses every eight miles with fresh mounts, the posts kept one horse saddled and ready to ride for an hour, rotating the stock, so that a messenger can leap off his mount and straight onto another. It would be an idea too if the messengers were changed every three posts. I believe that a fresh horse galloping along the side of the paved road can cover eight miles in less than half an hour. Changing saddled mounts in this way - and messengers too - would carry a message a hundred miles in about four hours. Maybe faster."

"Can we spare that many cavalry men?" Tutir was centurion of signals and very conscious of how quickly a good pool of horsemen could be denuded.

"Not trained cavalrymen - or at least, I don't want to. No. What I am suggesting is that we make use of boys and cavalry recruits who are of little value as yet for warfare, but are good horsemen. Boys for preference, they are light - and I would send two off at a time to account for accidents."

"That's a lot of horses primus."

"About three or four hundred if each post carries a stock of eight to make the rotating of saddled mounts practicable - Cantodunon is sending me about six hundred cavalry horses as well as the light cavalry."

"Have you finished, Caionac?" Lucius's voice was mildly caustic, "Tribune Causta is still examining the situation and our response."

"My apologies, General Lucius."

"Carry on Tribune, please"

"Thank you General, but it was a worthwhile interjection. Communication **is** the key - no doubt about it at all. So The second group is formed with the intention of outflanking Venutius's army, getting to the south of him without being observed and then, if he is intent upon decoying us into a battleground of his own choosing between Severnside and Riverdown, catching him by surprise and squeezing him against the reinforced garrison at Severnside. They will be our strongest group and even if Venutius does not behave as we think he ought to"

There was a brief outbreak of surprised laughter, Septimus Causta was not renowned for a sense of humour. ".....they be powerful enough to cope with his half disciplined army. The third group will take the gold mine on the Cothi and destroy whatever force Venutius has left to keep the slaves in check.

"Cothi is about sixty mile west of Ariconia's iron quarries and the country on the other side of the Severn road is largely unsurveyed, we have information for a mile or two on the western side, but little beyond that. Second and third group will head west as I said" Septimus paused for a moment, picked up a long pointer and walked around the table to the wallmap. The pointer sketched out a rough circle

"It is imperative that scouts get to the areas here and survey routes to the south - and they should start now. If they can find the river Cothi, that solves one problem, but - since the

purpose of the decoy party is bring Venutius's main army between the Severnside garrison (reinforced by four or five hundred men) and our second group, we must be able to find our way past him quickly and without revealing ourselves until the most convenient moment. That requires fast and accurate surveys and, just as important, the elimination of any scouts who become aware of us."

Kierhal had a question, "You indicated that both forces will cross the Severn before the second force turned south. How much further west will the Cothi attack have to travel before **they** turn south?"

Septimus shrugged his shoulders, "We don't really know yet, but if the surveyors get going today, we should have the information by the time the Cothi attack has crossed the Severn - which will give both western groups the opportunity to plan a schedule." He dropped the point of his wand to the floor and rested both hands on the, butt, "Don't forget that Venutius has been raiding for slaves extensively around the Cothi area, the land about there will be full of refugees only too willing to guide you. I would guess that there will be a suitable route south about twenty to thirty miles west of Severn. It is going to be more difficult for the second group, Venutius has only recently moved towards the Severn and there may not be many refugees.

"If the prince has been sensible and not ravaged the land, there may not be **any** refugees -, but I don't think that there is much chance of an army of Brigante warriors passing up any opportunity to kill, loot and burn. Do you?"

He placed the pointer on the table, "That is my reading of what needs to be done and my rough assessment of how we set about it. The rest is a matter of detail, timing, the structure of each group and the weaponry we will need." With a brief smile he, he gave them a nod of the head and returned to his seat.

"Thank you tribune." Lucius said and then looking to Caionac, "Tribune, you've had promises of more men from Cantodunon - what does our strength consist of now?" He stopped abruptly and clicked his tongue impatiently, "I was forgetting. Tutir, your business is to organise surveyors and signals - I don't think that there is any more that you can do here or need to know for the time being. Would you get two parties of surveyors, with rations for six days and spare horses equipped and sent on their way to the Severn. You know what we need to know for the second and third groups. They have three days before the army marches and begins to catch up, which means they must have routes for the second and third groups ready in four and five days respectively. Understood?"

"Yes General."

"Good man, off you go - I want them out of the fortress in the next two hours, even if the remounts have to follow." Tutir saluted, turned on his heel "... And don't forget the pigeons." He grinned assent and left the room - the major-domo only just got the door open in time.

"Back to you Caionac. Your report please."

But primus Caroc lifted a hand to catch his attention, "Excuse me General, but I have a question for Tribune Septimus Causta, if you will allow?"

"Certainly, let's dispose of that before we move to dealing with the numbers. What's the question?"

"Simply this General. I can see that Cothi with its goldmine is a valuable prize, but surely we could take it after dealing with Venutius at the Severn and avoid dividing our forces in three?"

Lucius eyebrow lifted in Septimus's direction who answered, "Perfectly valid question. Normally we avoid splitting our forces and particularly if it means separating them by forty or fifty miles as in this case, but ask yourself these questions. How often has Venutius escaped from a battle field? And, if he escapes this one, where will he head?"

Caroc laughed ruefully, "Yes, tribune. He might easily get away while we were still engaged with his army and then ... he would head straight for his gold, to try and save his fortune at least. With gold he might well form another army and we would have the whole thing to do over again. Thank you."

Caionac had been sorting his notes - and altering them. "Forgive me, these tablets have been altered and then altered again, but I think I have arrived at the correct figures now. The main problem was horses for survey, messengers and remounts for the courier posts. With the help of Cantodunon we can allow four hundred and fifty horses for those tasks and still have two thousand horses for our sixteen hundred cavalrymen. The light cavalry bring their own ponies and remounts. The mobile ballista cohorts allow five horses in a hundred for replacement." looking up from his tablets, he explained, "Those are for losses in transit of course, battle casualties usually result in the loss of the ballista too - so there is no need for replacement on the field."

"Finally the infantry. I had this originally at seven cohorts of fully trained men - I could field a cohort of six month recruits if necessary?"

Shaking his head, Lucius rejected the notion, "It is not simply the fighting, we are travelling long distances in three groups. Signals in the field, once fighting breaks out, will be more important than ever because our tactics may have to change radically. Not just a matter of moving reserves, refusing a front or wheeling to meet a flank attack. We are so much in the dark about the circumstances that will be revealed that we will depend very greatly upon the cohesion of the cohorts under trying conditions. Six months training is not sufficient - and I do not want a lot of loose centuries careering around amongst the rest of you. To sum up, then: you can meet the figures we determined on three days ago, almost seven thousand men?"

"Yes General."

"Tell me Caionac. You've seen these light cavalry with their ponies and handheld ballistas, haven't you. Describe their equipment and the method of use - doubtless they'll come with their own officers, but unless we all know what use can be made of them, they'll be no use at all."

"Well first, the things that you all know is that they are boys of fourteen and younger - too young for the legion, and they use small balistas that can be held in one hand. I haven't got a sample here, but the lads arrive tomorrow, so you'll all have the opportunity to see them. Briefly though, these balistas are made from a bowed piece of a steel that Duor has made by forcing air through molten cast iron..... Don't ask me to explain the process - I thought that burning iron destroyed it, but there you are, our Duor has turned into a remarkable man since he was exposed to Heron's influence."

Lucius, "'Exposed' is right - I thought one or other of them would murder the other, when Heron kept stealing Duor's best workers."

When the laughter had quieted, the tribune continued, "The bow fits across a wooden stock for the bolt to slide along and the whole thing is much lighter than a small ballista with the normal swinging arms would be. It's like a wooden bow turned on its' side. The ammunition was developed from the fire bolts that we are using in the mobiles. The bolts consist of a wooden shaft with a small, hard point, greased and socketed into it fairly loosely. The shaft gives it true flight, but when it hits a shield it is stopped suddenly and the narrow point shoots straight through - it's like a long leather worker's needle, a bit thicker, but straight, a foot long and pierces a wooden shield as easily as a needle pierces

leather. They have a useful range of about seventy or eighty yards against shields - one hundred against unshielded warriors."

"I'd like to see that before I trust an attack with such a weapon." Kierhal had his doubts, but seventy yards was well outside the killing range of any missile weapons the Brigante used. "At the same time, the lads will have plenty of time to get out of harm's way if the things don't work in actual warfare."

"That's exactly how they are to be employed, they gallop to within seventy yards on their ponies, form three ranks, discharge their weapons in turn and then gallop away." The tribune was enthusiastic, "I consider the first attack will be the most effective because I don't believe that Brigante warriors will consider ranks of boys drawn up seventy yards from their front as being anything, but entertainment. We should be able to mount two or three attacks before they develop any sort of counter to it."

"Difficult to see what infantry can do against such attacks - other than charging them before they form their ranks. Cavalry, ballista or slings would do it, of course."

"True, Jossoc -, but their cavalry is worse than useless and they have no missiles better than spears. I think that the light cavalry will goad them into charging as soon as the lads appear to be forming for a third or fourth attack. That's when heavy cavalry will have their chance, with the defensive line dissolving into a disorganised barbarian charge."

"Light cavalry for the Severn battle then." Lucius was intrigued by the concept and looked forward to seeing it demonstrated. "They are not suitable for attacking a fortification like Cothi will be, though. My own feeling is that most of Venutius force will be committed to his attempt to bring us to battle at a location of his choice in the area of Riverdown, leaving a garrison of a few hundred to control Cothi. His fortifications there will be of timber and so will all the buildings inside the walls. I suggest, one cohort of infantry, half the mobiles - armed with the incendiary bolts (Venutius isn't aware of those yet either), and two centuries of cavalry? The decoy column only needs three or four centuries of infantry and one of cavalry - that leaves us three thousand infantry, twelve hundred heavy cavalry, eight hundred light cavalry and half the mobiles for Venutius's main force. Five thousand men. Sufficient for seven or eight thousand warriors, d'you think?"

The chorus of confirmation made him smile, "Yes, I agree. Even though he has learned from us - and he apparently has a Roman advisor - I don't give him much chance of really converting warriors into disciplined soldiers - and he isn't aware of our light cavalry ... Yes,

I know they are unproved, but tribune Aiden would not be sending them from Cantodunon if he didn't think they would be effective.

"As I was saying, even with a better disciplined force the Brigante cannot be considered to be of legionary standard. We will cope with them very nicely. Remember, the basic rules that have been hammered home at every class of battlefield tactics you've attended: surprise your enemy, pierce his lines, worry the flanks and rear - and most armies will disintegrate quickly. If they lose cohesion your own casualties are practically nil. What we've discussed today will ensure that - if we can make our initial attack in our own time. Allow Venutius to surprise us instead, and we'll have a very hard time indeed."

Lucius rose to his feet, "If no-one has any other questions, this meeting is closed. Details have to be settled of course, do that amongst yourselves and check the final arrangements with Septimus Causta and myself tomorrow evening." He pushed a wax tablet over to Septimus who read it and then nodded in agreement. "Commanders of the three groups are as follows: tribune Caionac, the Severn battle; Kearhal, the decoy and Jossoc will command the attack on Cothi. That's it. Good-day, gentlemen." There were a couple of disappointed faces as the soldiers filed out of the maproom.

The exhibition by the light cavalry was impressive. They kept their formation well, formed ranks after their charge without confusion and the bolts fired went clean through two thicknesses of shields, leaving a tiny hole behind and the wooden shaft lying on the ground. Although useless to an enemy the shafts could be gathered up after a battle and new tips socketed in. Lucius found the hard cast iron tips interesting. They had a triangular cross-section and Duor made them by flattening a bed of sand, pressing a mould into it and cutting a feeder to the impressions. An iron plate was laid over the impressions and molten iron poured into the feeder. The result was a row of points that had 'chilled' as Duor put it, against the underside of the iron plate, and were dead hard and brittle. After breaking them off the rod that linked their bases, the tips were ready for coating with wax at the base and slipping into the wooden shafts.

"Can you do the same thing with the large bolts for the mobiles?" He wanted to know.

"Probably," Was the answer, "but the bolt would be a lot lighter than a solid iron one and not have the same range. That's what we found with the incendiary bolts that are made that way."

"Have a word with Lady Myrcal. I think she'd like both for shipboard use. She's not happy with those fire containers you asked her to try last time - they break into flame much too easily. If your new bolts can pierce planking at close range and squirt arboroleum inside the boat, I'd think she'd be overjoyed."

"I know - she told me." Duor smiled at the memory. "Yes. I believe I can do that."

Lucius stared at him and shook his head wonderingly; when he had first met this man ten years ago he had been their only smith and machines like ballista and water wheels had been totally beyond his experience. Talking to him about their manufacture had resulted in almost total silence and apparent incomprehension; now he blithely modified weapons and invented new processes without blinking. Duor had been in his fifties when Windubro was founded, who said you could not teach old dogs new tricks?

"Thank you master smith." And that was that. Lucius had no doubt that in due course Myrcal would be presented with the new weapon and it would do everything that Duor had implied by his, "Yes, I believe I can do that." As he left the principia for his home Lucius had another, more uncomfortable thought. He had always applied the "Old dogs" tag to Celtic warriors, men much more than twenty years old, and rejected them as untrainable. Had he rejected another like Duor - a man who **could** learn new tricks - and might have taught General Lucius a few too?

Chapter seventeen

Cantodunon

The news from Windubro had arrived hot on the heels of Myrcal's agreement that a 'progress' was needed and would be enjoyable.

"Damn Venutius!"

They were taking advantage of a day that was unseasonably bright and warm for late March and using the garden as an office. It was pleasant, peaceful and there was a quantity of administrative work that had formed a backlog simply because it needed their joint attention. Information from the intelligence network that Drusus was constructing in Gaul jibed with remarks that Lucius had made recently. The small network that he had established, with advice from Gaius Avitas, had located three traders, allegedly Parisi, who were taking too much interest in the settlements along the Ouse and the Trent. Their interest seemed to be a lot greater than the amount of trade could justify. By the greatest of misfortunes, a log fallen free of a lumber raft and with its ends already pointed for use in a settlement palisade, floated down river in the dusk and sank the boat that bore the traders and their goods. Nothing was recovered, but the traders and the boatmen - as an act of charity they were given clothes and shipped to their friends in Gaul. A simple story, but one that would most probably be repeated in various guises.

It showed that the network was of value, but the annoying thing was that if Gregory and Lucius had not prevaricated for twelve months and more, they might have had earlier notice of Venutius's enterprise. Well that was water down the river, thought Gregory and in a less vexatious tone damned the prince once again.

"But why?" said Myrcal, "It doesn't have to affect our progress, surely?"

Gregory really had not thought deeply about it, his annoyance was a simple reflex.

"Well, no. The legion can handle the man." He grinned, "I've told Lucius that he can't go. He must leave it to Aiden and his officers, they're perfectly capable and keeping them on apron strings is not good for their development."

"Being killed by Brigantes isn't good for their development either, Gregory."

"True, but there's small chance of that and it's an opportunity for them to practice what they've learnt from Septimus Causta before the Romans land and they are faced with more difficult opponents than Venutius."

She gave a happy laugh, "So, we get a holiday after all. When do we start?"

"Well the tracks are dry and there are firm road surfaces for much of the way, it may be a little chilly at night....."

"Gregory. I've slept on enough decks not to worry about a little cold at night."

He acknowledged with a laugh, "I know, I know. I'll organise an escort, light carts for the supplies and a few comforts and have one of Heron's workmen check the new cart over. I don't want it breaking halfway around our 'progress'. You know I like that word. Very expressive." There was a brief pause for calculation, "Two days?"

Myrcal was delighted, "As soon as that? How much space is there? Can we take a maid?" All the impedimenta of her office work was pushed to one side, but carefully, "I must start looking through my clothes immediately. It's bound to be cold and the new linen from Egypt has not been cut yet, there's some beautiful gold and silver braiding to edge it with, and the wolfskin from Germania - I was going to have a hood and mantle made from it for next winter ... Gregory there's a host of things to get ready."

"Well, we can delay it for as long as you like."

"Don't you dare! I'll be ready - and the maid can come?"

"Certainly. My secretary is definitely needed - they can share a tent."

"Not a chance - I don't need a pregnant maid thank you."

"What a pity, Paul will be disappointed, I know he's had his eye on that pretty little girl of yours."

"Eyes are one thing, hands are another completely. She can have a tent of her own."

"Take Somha. I don't fancy camp cooking, **she** can sleep with your Mai."

It was settled and while Myrcal went back indoors, Gregory took himself off to the workshops and Heron. Though he had a brilliant mind, Heron was difficult to work with and Gregory had moved the workshop away from the main complex along the river bank, to the other side of the quay. Since that was upriver, Heron's workshops were first on the leat that fed the waterwheels - which led to more trouble. Eighteen months ago that had been solved by constructing two more leats (the fish dam ensured a good head of water), and extending the forges, mills and foundries over them. Thankfully that was the end of the problems and Gregory was heartily grateful for it - although Heron had been responsible for his raising and education since the age of fourteen and was virtually a surrogate father, it had to be admitted that he did not really like other people - just his immediate 'family', Gregory, Myrcal and the children.

In fact Primus was in the workshop when Gregory walked in through the big double doors. "What are you doing here, young man? Is your tutor ill? Geometry today isn't it?"

"Yes, Da." The boy was a little abashed he had not expected to be discovered in Heron's forge.

"Well then, why are you here?"

"He's very boring, Da." His face brightened as he thought of a distraction for his father, "And GrandDa Heron's made new way of harnessing a horse to the cart. See!" A very grubby hand pointed into the gloom of the harness shop where Gregory became aware of a horse and the cart that he had come to inspect. What had Heron devised now?, but first, Primus.

"Well, you had better get back to the schoolroom. Go straight there mind, now ... Not through the legionary workshops. Understood?"

A depressed, hard-done-by voice answered, "Yes, Da." Primus shrugged, turned on his heel and walked slowly back into the sunlight.

Gregory strolled over to the horse and cart, the harness was certainly different, "What's this then on it's chest - armour?" He looked closer, "No not armour."

Heron joined him and pointed out that it was a slab of stiffened and padded leather that hung in front of the horse's chest, linking the shafts of the cart with short bronze chains from each end. A broad strap straddled the shoulders and, in supporting the shafts, held the padded slab at the right level.

"It was a mistake really, I had some new scrolls in from Alexandria, one was purely decorative - rather badly drawn, or maybe the copyist was at fault. Anyway the shafts were so misplaced that at first sight it looked like this." He indicated the breast band. "It wasn't of course, and I realised it very quickly, but it set me thinking." Sitting on the edge of a tackle box he looked up at his expupil, "Horses are very strong you know, easily as strong as eight or ten men, but harness them to a wagon and they can only pull as strongly as three men. So why is that d'you think? Eh?"

I don't know - I've never thought about it."

A stubby finger stabbed at Gregory's midriff, "Ahha. And neither had I, but tell me, if a team of men are set to haul on a rope to move a sledge or a wagon, they frequently make a loop in the rope, like a sort of harness. Yes? And do they put the loop around their necks?

"Of course not, not even a stupid Roman would do that. They slip it under their armpits and across their chests - and if they do it often they put a roll of cloth between the rope and their skin. So why do we harness a horse by putting a loop around its neck? Does it make sense? We've all seen how the veins stand out when it is taking the strain. So what did I do, when this superlative thought came to me? Eh? I made this harness, see? It is stiff enough to ride against his chest and not pull back against the top of his leg muscles, the shafts are fastened to it and can ride up and down a little and this band over his shoulders holds it at just the right height. And when I had built it, and accustomed the horse to it." That would have been a sight to remember Gregory thought, Heron was not patient with men, let alone animals.

"I harnessed another horse in the old way and linked them so they pulled in opposite directions, this one dragged the other, snorting and blowing, behind him. When I tried him against two horses in tandem it was an even contest. What d'you think of that then, my boy?"

"I think it is remarkable, Heron, but rather obvious really, isn't it?"

The Alexandrian roared in protest, "Obvious? Then why in Hades' name didn't you think of it?" subsiding when he saw Gregory's expression. "I know. I'm too easy to get a rise out of, but look at it lad, look. I believe that not only will it mean that a horse can draw a heavier load, I think you'll tire it less quickly. Just imagine what it must be like pulling a load with a rope halter around its' neck. The wonder is that it can work at all. We don't do it to oxen,

do we? A solid, padded yoke to pull back on the shoulders, not a rope throttling it, but a horse doesn't have shoulders like an ox, so we can't use a yoke." His hand reached out and slapped the stiffened leather, "We use this in future."

"It is remarkable Heron and I'd like it ready for use tomorrow, I'm taking Myrcal and an escort along the Ouse and around the new territories, the day after, but put the normal harness in the cart just in case we find a problem," He paused for a moment, "You know we already do something like this when we put a donkey to mill corn - it doesn't drag the mill bar behind it, it pushes against it. That's right, it pushes! Why have we been throttling horses then?"

Heron's eyes widened at the realisation, they had used donkey mills for grinding corn before they had sufficient water power and he had never remarked the difference in harness. "Ah well!

"So you're going off into the new lands. Is it safe to take Myrcal with you, lad? It borders Brigante country."

"Don't worry, I'm taking a strong escort of cavalry - she'll be safe enough; and she'll enjoy it too. Myrcal has been stuck at home these last nine months or so and there's a baby due in seven months. If we don't get away together now, we won't be able to for eighteen months or so."

"Well, enjoy yourselves." There were more immediate matters on Heron's mind, though, "The horse is already harnessed, so why not try the cart along the river road?"

"What did you think I came for? The harness is a surprise, but it was the comfort of the cart that I wanted to check out before I subject Myrcal to a couple of hundred miles of travelling over hardened roads and trackways." Gregory was impatient, he had not seen the harness in a good light yet, Heron's description made it pretty clear to him even in this poor light, but its effectiveness would depend on the detail - Heron was not always reliable on detail. The horse was gentled out of the harness shop.

In the bright April sunlight, the whole arrangement became clear. The stiffened breast band was padded to spread the pressure across the areas on either side of the sternum, straps over the shoulders and one broad one under the chest were attached to a girth strap. Gregory saw that the shafts of the cart were attached by short chains to both the girth and the ends of the breast band. The whole assembly seemed flexible, but positive - whilst holding the shafts a little lower on the body than normal. It was also more

complicated and from the number of attachments and the variety of their adjustment it was clear that Heron considered that the driver needed to become very familiar with his horse and the cart. In fact it seemed to Gregory that Heron had invented problems that could only be surmounted by matching horse, harness and cart precisely, but Heron had intimated that the horse could pull at least twice as strongly - it would be worth taking trouble for that degree of advantage.

"Both Myrcal and I will be driving, Heron - I'd like to find out how that seat responds to two people sitting on it." The seat was supported on three cantilevers of the same steel that Heron had developed for the light cavalry bows, fastened to the body of the covered cart and allowing the seat to spring up and down. The idea was to remove the shock transmitted from the road by the wheels. It was clear to Gregory that it would respond to two people quite differently than one.

"Why not? It's a nice day, the road along the river will be pleasant and a reasonable demonstration. Come on, my boy up you get and I'll open the gate." There was a short earthen track from the gate in Heron's compound to the stone surfaced river road. As Heron clambered up after closing the gate, Gregory cracked the reins over the horse's back and set him into a trot.

"He seems to find it comfortable anyway," He observed, trying to remember how easily the cart had moved last time he tested it.

"Wait 'til we get on a proper road, you can put him to the gallop."

"Gallop? With a cart to pull?"

"Oh I've already done it, Gregory. Here, hand me the reins." They were within a hundred yards or so of the road and Gregory grabbed hold of the seat with both hands as Heron urged the horse up to a fast trot over the relatively rough track. The cart bucked and bounced, it became very difficult to maintain their seats, but the horse showed no discomfort at all and, when the cart rolled onto the road with a jolt sufficient to lift the wheels off the ground, he increased his pace until it was not far short of a gallop.

"All right, all right! For Lugh's sake slow down, Heron; you'll kill us."

Dark features beaming, the Alexandrian pulled back on the reins and gradually slowed the horse to a gentle walk, "Could two horses have pulled us that fast, Gregory? And did you notice the difference in comfort? Bouncy yes (that was an understatement), but not a

storm of blows to your posterior, eh?"

A shake of the head was more than enough answer for that topic, but Gregory had something more in mind now that the efficacy of the harness and the sprung seat had been proved to his satisfaction, "Heron, you've just added another invention to our tally of improvements here in Camelod .. "

"Two."

"Two ?"

"Two improvements."

"Be quiet for a moment and stop quibbling. Have you any idea how many such improvements have been born in our land in the last ten years? Some by you, two by me and the others by men and women you would have dismissed as ignorant Celts a few years ago. We have stirrups, the mobile ballistas, the springing for the ballista, fulling mills, tilt hammers, steam hammer, blowers for the furnaces, water wheels, cast iron, the harness and the sprung seating and that is not all by a long way.

"Now, We're building you an academy in the new city - a city that will be protected by a fortress, but will have no other military connections, no commercial docks, no manufacturing workshops, a truly civilian and civilised city. It will be the centre for the administration and government of Camelod and it will be where the Senate meets when we have enough senators to make a Senate logical. Myrcal and I will live there most of the time and receive and entertain all high ranking visitors. Oh, there will be shops and Ceilidh houses, baths, housing of all types for herders, agriculturists and most of the usual city population, but it will not be concerned with industry directly." Gregory waited a moment to ensure that this picture of his new capital was maturing in Heron's imagination.

"Your academy will be for teaching of course, but I want you to build workshops there for yourself, Duor ..."

"Duor!" Heron was affronted, he and the elderly mastersmith had a mutual antipathy that sometimes became very public.

"Yes, Duor - even if we have to build a wall between the two of you. He's a skilled man, old friend, and has some surprising insights on occasion." Heron mumbled, in truth he did have a grudging respect for the man, but he was so coarse!

"So we will have a centre where I can bring together the men and women who produce ideas."

Gregory scanned Heron's expression to see how he would respond to the idea of a Celt having worthwhile ideas. The older man simply held the reins loosely and stared out over the horses head as they rolled on steadily away from the town. At least he wasn't ranting and fuming.

"The capital will be a centre for education, administration, government and research - a talking club with workshops. In that club I want our own homegrown philosophers and engineers - and I want your recommendations of men and women from Alexandria, Rome, Gaul and Hispania, whom you could persuade to live here, teach and develop more new ideas for Camelod's commercial gain and military strength."

"Nobody's ever done that before, boy." Heron's expression was a mixture of puzzlement and obvious pleasure. "You know how it went in Alexandria, some of us taught, some gave lectures, some produced interesting items for the the rich and the priesthoods, some of us did nothing except think - and relied on patrons held to us by a love of learning - or what passed for that. Nobody ever expected us to talk to each other - without coming to blows. I'm an even tempered man as you know, but I had difficulty keeping my temper when I was subjected to some of the rubbish that my peers espoused."

Gregory made no comment.

"But I can see that it might be useful, iron and flint striking together are exactly that, my boy, useful. Now if our club only met occasionally, say once a month - I dare say that we could bear to listen to others and discuss new ideas sensibly. There'd have to be rules, like those governing speakers in the Senate, but I suppose I have exaggerated the verbal violence likely to result. We did talk together you know, not in any formal atmosphere like your idea, but the occasional meeting could often be managed without bloodshed," His laughter did put the lie to his picture of middle aged academics coming to blows whenever they met.

"I like the idea of a club for discussing ideas. And, of course, the rest of the time we would be teaching, or working in our workshops."

"The club must accept 'visitor speakers' as well Heron. I've just pointed out to you that our Celts have ideas of their own - frequently bereft of any philosophical reasoning or structure - and I want to develop the useful ones to our commercial and military advantage."

"Certainly, certainly. Your mastersmith Duor has an excellent brain - he's just rather argumentative, and I know that there are others like him." Heron caught hold of Gregory's elbow as he brought the horse to a stop, "You know, Gregory. Back in Alexandria, when we were working together, it never occurred to me that ordinary men might spend some of their time actually thinking. It seemed so obvious that the hoi poloi ate, procreated and worked and nothing else. That seemed to me to be their purpose in life. After all, why would the Gods waste time giving them minds as well as strong limbs?" The look he gave Gregory was almost puzzled - or maybe it was amazement at how his own thinking had altered in just five or six years. Life was more complicated than it had seemed. A blink cleared his face of doubts for the moment and he leapt down to grasp the bridle and turn the horse around in the width of the road; the task involved a great deal of heaving and backing before it was done and Heron was his old confident self again as he climbed onto the seat again. The drive back to the town was taken at a more leisurely pace and Gregory was very happy with the comfort, just the addition of a well stuffed leather cushion that would repel rain, would make the journey he and Myrcal were proposing, very pleasant indeed.

"You could draw a heavier mobile ballista with a harness like this." Heron suddenly announced without any logical lead to the statement, "Bigger heavier wheels for rough country, too."

Yes, thought Gregory, but would that be an advantage, maybe the same size of weapon on a stouter carriage that would not need so much maintenance and could be moved about much faster? Larger diameter wheels? They were back at the workshop and he still had not decided - it was a problem that could be dealt with at a later time.

A ration pack for one man per day weighed approximately one and three quarter pounds and contained one pound of flour, a quarter of a pound of fat bacon and the same of dried peas or beans, half that of raisins and again of salted soft lard. In addition there would be fruit in summer time, onions, cabbage, carrots - probably about another half a pound in all. The total amount of food to be carried for a twenty day march was forty five pounds - a heavy load for any infantry man, but there were almost half as many horses and ponies as

men and if the cavalrymen marched, the horses could readily walk with two men's rations on each, as well as spare pilum and a hand ballista.

Camelod's army was very different in character to that of Windubro eight years ago, not one man of the force selected to face Venutius (except the light cavalry, of course) had less than two years training. Not simply in discipline and weapons drill, but extended marches in all weathers, with simulated battles and a fortified marching camp constructed each night - and dismantled every morning. If needed, the towns could put together a mixed infantry and heavy cavalry force of almost six thousand toughened soldiers - and the first and second cohorts of infantry consisted of men who had served for four or five years. Despite being formed of men much younger than the average Roman legionary with two years service, their effectiveness and morale was at the least equal to the Roman model.

The route ran parallel to the river Trent and six boats ferried the mobile ballistas to the Severn road, leaving another two hundred and forty horses to act as pack animals to that point. It saved wear and tear on the ballistas - half of them probably had sixty or seventy miles cross-country to do once they left the Severn road. The weapons were tough, but the legion's artillery men reckoned that they were only good for a hundred miles or so before needing to have wheels and axles maintained in the legionary workshops - and fifty shots was calculated to be the safe limit for discharges. Mobile ballistas were intended to be mobile and were much more lightly built than Roman field ballistas; it was both their advantage and their disadvantage.

Marching light extended the length of march between night camps to thirty miles, palisade posts and spades were carried by men, horses and ten light, four wheeled carts drawn by two horses in tandem, all travelling at the same speed with no oxen and heavy wagons to hold them back., but it was a long column, the road alongside the Trent was not a major one since most traffic used the river, it was only twelve feet wide with a cleared stretch of grass to either side. The carts kept to the road, as did the infantry in columns of six, stretching over three quarters of a mile. It allowed the animals to graze on grass unbruised by boots and saved strapping on the iron sandals that were needed to protect hooves from the road surface. The first camp was sited twenty miles short of the Severn road station. Although it was still early in the year the Brigante ponies of the light cavalry found enough grazing to suit them, but the larger cavalry horses needed oats as well ... oats that were carried on the barges, ten tons in all. Making camp also entailed unloading two tons of that shipment; the same thing would happen tomorrow when they expected to camp close to the point at which they would strike west. After that the cavalry depended on the two twenty pound bags that were slung across each horse's back - on top of the other

equipment. While the campaign proceeded the remaining oats from the barges would travel by road and track in the wake of the army, setting up depots for the return journey. That arrangement gave a wide measure of safety, since it was expected that the second group would take two days to get into position and the third (with only the ballista horses to feed oats to), four days.

Caionac called a staff meeting when the camp was finished, the cooking fires were roasting the small amount of game that had been garnered by outriders and the camp ovens were heating ready for the flat loaves that constituted a third of the ration.

"We're doing well so far. Have any messengers come through from the Severn road? Has Venutius got his spies far along it?"

Galbin had responsibility for survey, signals and scouts, a lithe, very brown man with lined features and deeply socketed eyes that seemed to be smiling most of the time - which added to the lines. He shook his head, "Not yet tribune. He seems to be keeping his head down, my lads wouldn't have missed him if he was anywhere near the Severn Station - I've got two hundred men out there, what with surveyors and signals men as well as the scouts."

"How soon can you get them off the road and over to the west? We must make sure he sees us and two hundred scouts and surveyors is liable to frighten his own scouts away."

"Most of them 've already left the road, tribune, by now they should be about two days ahead of us. I'll know for certain by the second hour tomorrow, when the courier from Windubro brings in this evening's pigeon messages. Apart from a small party of 'clumsy' scouts on the road to Severnside, the area will be clear. Venutius should get information shortly after we set foot on the Severn road - we're making it easy enough for him, by God."

"Well that's good. We simply have to hope that he doesn't think it too easy to be true!" Caionac looked about the encampment it was one hundred and twenty yards square and contained almost nine hundred tents - the horses were tethered outside, guarded by two centuries of infantry. "He should notice us making camp tomorrow, anyway."

"I've had a thought; once we hit the road tell the men that they should sing and a certain amount of skylarking is permissible. Tell them to make the most of it, because the next morning only the decoy column makes any noise; Jossoc and I steal away into the woods and hills as quietly as possible." Looking around him at his command Caionac smiled with

satisfaction. "Given reasonable luck we will have the details of an easy crossing point of the upper Severn by mid-day and a comfortable route marked for us. I would like you both to get together a party of a couple of hundred men to make sure that the route is smoothed as much as possible for the ballistas and carts. A lot depends on them, we could take on Venutius's army of tribesmen with a fair degree of comfort, but the new weapons could make it almost a walkover. One last thing. Tomorrow when we reach the start of the Severn road, you may break out the Legion's boar standards. That is the first infantry, the first cavalry and the mobiles - and when we part from the decoy column, the standards will continue with Kearhal, with a full standard party for each, and drums and pipes playing." He got up from his squat on a boulder, "Well that's it, unless there are any questions? No? Well I'll wager there'll be questions this time tomorrow. That's wild boar roasting over there from the smell - I'm getting over before it's all gone."

Riverdown

Venutius had much to be proud of. He had taken this town and its garrison of two hundred with very little trouble. It was not a walled town like Windubro and the garrison was not housed in a proper fortress; one had been planned, but the expeditions along the Ouse and Derwent and their outcome - and the lack of materials resulting, had kept the garrison too small to build a substantial defence for themselves and with only the promise of assistance from the mother town - a promise that had been easy to avoid fulfilling in the peaceful years of 41 and 42. A gathering of warriors at night and then with first light, the Brigante rushed the town and swamped the garrison.

They had transported four hundred and fifty male slaves down the river and across to Hispania, kept the rest of the males working in the ironworks and taken the women for concubines and personal slaves. Riverdown now had a population of nine thousand fighting men, eight hundred of them warriors of standing who had taken up residence in the town and were rapidly learning new vices. That was a source of worry to Venutius. Warriors were not used to the comforts of a Camelod town, nor the trade that had come with it. Wines and expensive fabrics imported from ships that had sailed into the mouth of the Severn with the intention of doing business with Camelod - and were now happy to deal with the conqueror of Riverdown. His warriors were becoming soft. It was quite amazing, but in a few short weeks they had progressed from typical Celtic warriors to budding urban nobles. If the Camelodians did not respond soon he would have trouble on his hands.

The present situation that was growing in the town was not to his liking, he wondered whether he had been wise to delay the news of the fall as long as he had. It had been relatively easy; most of the boat movement on the river was from Severnside not to it and by the simple expedients of firstly surrounding the town and killing anyone moving away from it, and secondly, preventing any boats sailing upriver, he had gained twenty days. He had calculated that he had more than a month before the Camelodians appeared on his doorstep. On the one hand that had given him plenty of time to set traps on the river and along the river bank - the two routes that were almost certain alternatives for the approach to Riverdown. The other side of the coin was that, in a totally unexpected fashion, his warriors had settled into town life with enthusiasm. All the disciplined movements of men that he had rehearsed with them in Cothi, were being ignored - how much would be remembered in battle, he mused?

Earlier, Venutius had found a partial solution to the problem of controlling his men by forming them into hundreds of small units of much the same size, each led by a warrior. That had caused other problems of course, a warrior judged and was judged by the strength of his following. Why should a famous man give up some of his fighting men to a warrior of lesser fame, simply to make the units of similar size?

Once that had been solved by means of blatant bribery, there had been the business of persuading each group to maintain a simple formation of three lines, when charging. After months of bullying and diplomacy at Cothi, Venutius had eight hundred units who could maintain a battle line - individually. Actually co-ordinating them was chancy, there had still been a strong tendency for the units to vie with each other and strive to beat their neighbouring units to the enemy. In the mock battles that Venutius had staged, it had not been unusual for fighting to break out between the attacking units, because one considered that the other had obstructed its charge. A worse situation than when they all charged as a horde of individuals!

In the few weeks before he had decided that they were ready to fight Camelod again, there had been real progress, eight hundred units all arrived at the designated position more, or less in concert. From there it was a reasonable extension to form units into groups of one hundred men. There was no question of any units remaining as a reserve, but he could manage without that 'luxury'. The point was that he would have to, there was not the slightest possibility that his army would become more restrained in their attitude. It was a good army, filled with battle hardened men and enthusiastic to fight the Camelodians. The delay had softened that to a certain degree - it would get worse he knew and so, two days ago he had allowed a boat to escape upriver. Now he had to wait and see how long it

would take for a repisal to be made and an attempt to retake Riverdown, the days were dragging by.

Nevertheless, there was no chance that Camelod could afford to ignore his conquest altogether and his worries were probably exaggerated - they made a piquant sauce for his triumph.

His own dwelling was the Council House and former residence of the chief councillor of Riverdown. Two storied, built in Roman fashion, but with timber for the most part. It had two large reception rooms on the ground floor and eight private rooms on the first - and a private bath house. It had taken some very bloody threats to persuade the household servants to operate it and two of them had died as examples of what those threats really meant. Now they accepted that the Brigante ruled them - in particular Prince Venutius ruled them and their citizenship of Camelod was defunct.

When Venutius had first conceived the idea of taking Riverdown as a ploy to draw the Camelodians out of Windubro and onto open ground where he could defeat them, Riverdown had merely been a convenient bait, but after more than thirty days riding the countryside setting his traps and ambush sites, it meant very much more to him than that. The broad expanse of the Severn valley was soft and green, dotted plentifully with small farms of cattle, sheep and horses. Presumably it had once been mainly forest, but there was little of that now, small woods left as a source of game, and acorns and beechmast for pigs, separated the farms. Fields of wheat, barley and oats, shallow, flooded meadows of water cress, and root crops he was unfamiliar with, were interspersed with the livestock. So many streams crossed it to the river, draining the land that there were relatively few bogs. To east and west the land rose a thousand, fifteen hundred feet and old hillforts glowered across the valley at each other. Malvern to the west, Bredon (famed for its flint knappers) to the north east and Cleeve due east. Their teeth and utility were long gone, but they had a sombre history and seemed to form a palisade around the shallow waves of grassland and farms that lay between them. It could be a very rich country, Venutius was sure. That Roman, Honorius Galba, had made the point that Rome needed grain for her legions - and wool, and hides and any number of things that he could see this land producing given a firm hand. It was beautiful too; each river and stream had it attendants of willow and alders, lining each bank, dividing the countryside into multi-coloured tiles like a Roman mosaic or, more fittingly, a Celtic plaid cloak. Water transport down the Severn and, further afield, the Avon, would bring the produce together, but what a pity that the great river flowed to the western side of the island instead of the south or south east. Never mind, the Romans wanted wheat, they would solve that transport problem - he would not need to worry about it.

One of those small rivers, the Teme was the site of one of his traps - or at least its confluence with the Severn was. Groups of men were almost finished building a boom of chained logs across the river. The boom itself was done, but it was intended to be a sunken boom, held just above the riverbed by stone anchors; a rope was to be rove through rings on the sides of the logs and the ends of short chains from the anchors. When the boom was in place and invisible a horse tethered to the rope would draw it through the rings, releasing the boom so that it surged to the surface of the river. This was a hundred yards down river from the junction. Just up the Teme were piles of tree trunks, concealed by foliage. When the Camelodians came down in their boats the boom would be released as they passed the mouth of the Teme, bringing them to a sudden halt and certain confusion, the logs tipped into the Teme would flow into the boats and, although the rivers were neither of them swift, the logs would do a lot more than disrupt the column of boats. With luck several would sink, the rest would head for the banks - where Venutius was already prepared.

It was an idea that sprang from one of his conversations with the Roman who had brought gold and Rome's friendship. Gaius had been describing incidents from his service in Germania, the legion was marching along a wide tract of meadowland. They were not armoured, for the sun was hot, their scouts had reported the area clear of natives and any fool could see that there was nowhere to hide. The Legate had used that very phrase to a young tribune who had queried the safety of letting all the men put their armour in the century carts.

"Excuse me Legate, but wouldn't it be prudent to have a quarter of the men armoured and marching on the flanks? They could take it in turns, an hour at a time."

"Young man. I've fought on this frontier for a total of five years now, first as a tribune myself and then later, as you see me now. The Germans are big, they are excitable - far too big and excitable to hide behind that withered scrub and puny bushes. Any fool can see that there is nowhere to hide."

It was a phrase that had registered with the tribune (Galbo, of course), because at that precise moment, Junius averred, as if triggered by the challenge to Fortuna a positive army of Germans - large, wild **and** excitable - sprang from the very ground where they had lain for hours under sturdy hurdles supporting the turves they had cut to make the pits. Roman discipline had withstood the challenge. That and the fact that the Germans, not being able to see clearly where the general staff were located in the mile long column of soldiers, servants, supply wagons and camp followers, had launched the attack early and

struck at the leading cohort. Cavalry on the flanks had then woven a cautious path through the exposed pits, but their intervention had been robust enough to give the rest of the column time to arm itself - and the staff were intact. A fact that was commented on with guffaws in the primus pilus's tent that night.

An interesting tale. Venutius had set out his pits on both banks of the river at a distance of forty yards or so from the beaten tracks. He had improved on the German scheme by arranging a signals system of long cords leading to a large portion of the pits - they would give the signal without warning the Camelodians and the noise would alert the rest of the men as effectively as any other signal. If the legion was a combined river and land force he would have them - if they were a land force only, they must come down the left bank of the Severn or cross the Teme - no general would take the risk of making an unnecessary river crossing, particularly at a confluence. A land force only would be to his advantage because he would certainly know several hours in advance and could concentrate all his force on the one bank.

And then he realised that he needed to have more pits ready for that eventuality - well easy enough, he had them spread over half a mile to take the centre of the column, he could easily introduce more.

Venutius was not fool enough to put all his eggs in one ambush - he smiled relishing the ridiculous simile - the ambush must simply hold the Camelodians down for a quarter of an hour or so so that his second force could sweep up from a position well beyond the enemies scouts, and finish the task. Since the Roman delegation had visited, Venutius had become enamored of 'sophisticated' tactics. This beautiful, elegant scheme was the result of many hours of cogitation and he loved it with a passion that entirely clouded his warrior's experience of warfare. In particular he placed too much faith in the logic of cause and effect. So he prepared his elaborate trap just below the Teme's confluence with the Severn and he waited for news in his comfortable house in Riverdown.

Pencalta on the upper Ure

Venutius's northern diversion had disappeared. In fact the garrison at Pencalta were unaware of it. The other garrisons along the river system of Ure and Ouse, Isura and Ebor were equally unaware that the Brigante were planning an attack.

The eastern Brigante allies of the prince had formed a hosting - a formidable one - and started off towards Pencalta, the westernmost fortress town of Camelod. They were from tribes to the northwest of Pencalta and were following the valley of the Ure through the

rough hills - it would have brought them easily to their target had it not been for a party of scouts with a desire to see what lay beyond the next ridge. This was unknown territory to the horde and they took the sensible precaution of scouting far ahead. Unfortunately for Venutius's plan the scouts looked down on the rich valley of the Swale. Rich in cattle, sheep and corn - and well populated with potential slaves. There could be no question of bypassing such a wealthy and peaceful land. The Brigante returned to their homes well blooded and very rich in booty. They had not forgotten Pencalta, but it made no sense to drive the sheep, cattle and slaves to the garrison and then fight - so they reserved the adventure for another day - and it was ten days before Pencalta learned of the raids up and down the Swale valley and made a bloody reprisal with heavy cavalry.

Seven cohorts of infantry, two of heavy cavalry, one of light cavalry and one of mobile ballista stretched along a mile and a half of the Severn road. Preceded by three standard bearers carrying three silver boars (no boar standards had been awarded to the light cavalry as yet), and each accompanied by the six man standard party, clad in scarlet tunics, dark blue breeks, a black bearskin slung crosswise and complicated helmets of gilded bronze. The parties marched one behind the other in order of seniority, the infantry first, mobiles next and the heavy cavalry last. Three battle honors hung on the infantry' and mobiles' standards, one on the heavy cavalry.

Behind them marched the signifers, arranged in three groups according to the signalling instrument they use, tuba, corneto and horn. And then the seven thousand men of Camelod's army, infantry marching in column of sixes, cohort by cohort - separated by the cohorts junior officers, messengers and three corneto. Cavalry walked in column of fours and the mobile ballistas, column of twos. Each branch following the pattern of cohorts separated by junior officers, messengers and signifers.

No instruments were played, but the men sang their marching songs - often in opposition between successive cohorts - boots and hooves, thudded onto the paved surface of the road, and dust spirted up from the joints between the stones to hang heavily over three quarters of the column. It was impressive, noisy and there was no chance of Venutius's scouts missing it. Although the army was marching 'light' with no heavy wagons - just the cohorts' light carts - it stretched back a long way.

"Are we making enough noise?" Caionac asked of his centurion of scouts. He got a raised eyebrow in response, "Yes, I guess we are. Just think of the entertainment we're giving Venutius's warriors."

"It's nothing to what we'll give him in three days time, tribune."

"A happy thought. Now, how close are we to the track that has been prepared?"

It was two miles only and the cavalry swept ahead to strengthen the scouts clearing of enemy eyes from the area. An hour later, units began to part from the main column and head west into the woods. A camp was formed with the road forming the *via principia* down its' centre line. Plenty of hands ensured that the ditches and pallisades were imposing and clearly large enough to contain the seven thousand men. Anybody wiser in the behaviour of Roman armies setting up camp would have been suspicious of the confusion that appeared to reign in the area, but Venutius's scouts were **not** familiar with military procedure and, in any case, were not vouchsafed any easy view of the proceedings.

By the time the dust had settled and hundreds of cooking fires sparkled inside the camp walls, over six thousand men had disappeared into the woods, and their tracks well disguised by the remaining decoy party. Caionac had one thing more to say to the commander of the decoy party, "Yours is the most dangerous job, Kearhal. You have only a few centuries and yet you have to encourage Venutius's army to attack you. Remember that the prince is not stupid, he is not going to make the mistakes he made before. In particular he is not about to attack Severnside when it has just had a large reinforcement. You'll still have a hundred scouts in a screen to remove prying eyes - and by then I hope Venutius will be convinced of our aim and not bother too much about watching us closely - he'll just want to know where we are and at what speed we're traveling. When you get to Severnside, stay there for two days, I'm heading for the southern end of Malvern and will get pigeons off to Windubro when I am sure of being a day's march from there. Their messengers will take less than a day to reach you and that will finalize your starting off point.

"Maximum noise, maximum dust, the ten carts in a wide front on the left bank. No boats, I have no doubt that the prince can repeat his river traps from the Ouse. Take it easy, start at dawn and when you get to the Teme come to a stop, cross the Severn and settle down in the angle between the two rivers on the Teme's left bank. That should force him to concentrate on the Malvern side of the Severn."

Chapter eighteen

Afondon

"Up you get dear." Gregory handed his wife up onto the cart seat - now beautifully padded with a long leather cushion fully six inches thick and stuffed with wool. Looking up at her as she scrambled neatly into position (only two months gone and hardly any thickening to make the process graceless or awkward), he admired the glow that pregnancy always brought to her complexion. For some reason Myrcal never suffered with sickness in the mornings as other women (he was told), suffered. In fact for each of her pregnancies she had seemed to become more lovely and livelier than ever. It was her complexion that had told the tale to Gregory, before she was even sure herself, that she had quickened.

He clambered up himself, neatly and with an economy of movement that rewarded his recent resumption of regular exercise, appearing every morning on the legion's parade ground and joining the troops in their regular morning workout. It was enjoyable. Gregory had forgotten the pleasure of muscles that sang with the tensions and relaxations of the standard routine, the light sweat on his forehead, the warmth of muscles that had been worked hard and the satisfaction of having reactions that had responded well to practice with the heavy wooden swords. There was the companionship of the men too, weapons practice was taken in pairs and everybody mixed according to build, wearing the anonymous padded armour and helmet with no indication of rank - not that his opponents had any difficulty in recognising the Crane, his tall, slightly stooped posture and beak of a nose made that easy. The half hour of exercise every morning was central to the morale and comradeship of the legion and at the end of it, hot bread from the legion's bakery and watered wine - a good quality wine, Camelod had no reason to stint its troops. He did not stay for the marching drill!

Winter this year had been mild, but wet and windy, weeks of continuous wind and drizzle with outbursts of heavy rain to enliven it. In recompense these last three weeks had been dry and bright, and today at the outset of their journey, the sun shone brightly and grew warmer with every minute that passed.

Simply for effect Gregory had elected to enter the town by road. The Fortunate Voyager had landed them a couple of miles down river and the cart - and the horse, protesting mightily - had been lifted separately onto the road from the deck by crane. Three mobiles and a half century of heavy cavalry acted as escort; the entire party was horseborne; since the intention was entirely peaceful there was no need for infantry - the cavalry and ballistas would provide all the protection that would be needed.

"I'm going to enjoy this Gregory."

"Me too," He gathered up the reins in his left hand, "Hold on Myrcal, let me show you the difference this harness makes - just for a hundred yards or so - no sense in exhausting the animal needlessly. Ready? "

Venutius had placed command of the ambush near the confluence of Teme and Severn, in the hands of one of his oldest supporters. Not that Brendon was elderly, a sturdy, morose warrior of middling height, he had been a firm supporter of Venutius for more than twenty years. What was important from the prince's point of view, was the fact that Brendon was not an impulsive man. He could be trusted to follow his orders and not surrender to a sudden urge to charge into the thick of battle - and behind that bovine expression there was intelligence.

One thousand Brigantes were encamped fairly comfortably in woods a mile off the route that the force from Severnside was expected to take - indeed, must inevitably take if they were to make contact with Venutius. And if they hadn't wanted to make contact they would not be approaching the river Severn anyway. The army from Windubro was estimated to be between seven and eight thousand strong; the Camelodians would not be able to accommodate that number of men in the fortified town, so they must build a camp outside and stay there for a day or two while they reorganised themselves. There were known to be several hundred men in the town as a garrison and it was anybody's guess whether these would be left as a garrison or added to the force that would march down river - not that it would make much difference, Venutius's army had swollen in the last five days and now numbered eleven and a half thousand, but half of those had no training at all in the new battle tactics! Nevertheless, Venutius felt confident.

The traps in the river had been checked and found to be fully effective, the pits had been dug and hurdles made to support the turves - which had been watered assiduously to prevent them changing colour - and the men knew what needed to be done when the time came. The pits on the left bank were sufficient for one thousand warriors, those on the more unlikely right bank, for three hundred - there would be plenty of time to make a choice of the options that this gave them. The Brigantes waited. They waited for four full days after it was reported that the army had entered Severnside, built the expected camp along the souther wall of the town and were now simply sitting there. What for? Brendon wondered. There was a steady stream of supply wagons on the Severn road, but surely the Camelodian army did not need to replenish their rations so soon. Perhaps the town

Celtic Empire - Camelod

itself had been under-supplied? There was nothing more he could do about the situation. His major problem lay in keeping the interest of his warriors, who had grown bored with the affair after one complete day. There would be trouble if much more time elapsed before the ambush was needed.

In fact he need not have worried, twenty four hours ago a sweating messenger galloped eight miles and delivered a packet to Kearhal just eight hours after it had left Windubro. The other two parties had floated a bridge across the Severn and were now pursuing their own schedule. A great stirring of wagons and troops took place first thing the next morning, the screen of scouts allowed time for this to be reported to Venutius and then swept the area clear. In fact Venutius was at Riverdown and it was Brendon who received the reports of movement out of the camp - and with considerable relief.

Time was allowed for the Camelodian scouts to pass the stretch of almost a half mile with the pits and then Brendon ordered his men to install themselves in them while a detail went around making sure that the concealment was not blemished by any carelessness. The camp was twelve miles away and it would take the army another two hours (allowing for the time taken by the scouts), to reach the site. Brendon and the men who had the signal cords in hand and ready to alert one in four of the pits, made themselves comfortable under cover. More waiting. A few Camelodian scouts passed up river taking reports to the army. It was almost midday and the concealed men were finding it very uncomfortable beneath the hurdles and turf.

Kearhal was within four miles of the Teme when it was brought to his notice that the river was safer to cross some miles short of the confluence, three miles to be exact and so parties, already prepared with wagonloads of cut and notched timbers, ropes and stakes, were sent off to prepare the crossing. Orders had been flexible about the crossing point, because although the road was fully laid no one had ever thought to survey the river for a crossing point until this expedition. Three miles short of the confluence would do just as well. Stakes anchored long cables to each bank, the timbers were lashed and pegged into rafts large enough to take a century at a time and by the time the decoy party reached it the ferry was complete. Men and equipment took their turns to climb aboard the two rafts and then they were drawn across the river on a horse drawn rope, pivoting on the long anchor cables. It was not a fast procedure, indeed it could have been done more quickly, but there was no necessity to hurry, best do the job safely and unhurriedly; the scouts had reported the country clear of Brigante for the next twenty miles, so why not?

Brendon was horrified when he was told that the army had halted three miles short of his ambush and begun to cross the river. What was more the Camelodians had apparently split their army, for only eight or nine hundred men had been seen, leaving at least six thousand doing something inexplicable further up river. He had two choices (after the obvious one of reporting the situation to Venutius). He could move his men upriver and try to catch the Camelodian vanguard in the midst of their crossing, or he could cross the river himself, ready to meet up with their main force and advance on the Teme. Since it was obvious that by the time his own small force reached the crossing point, the Camelodians would almost certainly have finished - at the most there would be wagons and a few stragglers - not enough to provide cover from the mobile ballista which must now be on the right bank. He did the wise thing and crossed the river in a state of considerable rage.

Venutius was already on the left bank and ready to join the ambushers a quarter of an hour after their stroke at the Camelodians. With the message from Brendon and the prospect of six thousand cavalry and infantry somewhere out of sight, either on the left or the right bank - possibly on both, he had little choice, but to split his force before hurrying up river, throwing out scouts to left and right for at least a mile, as he went. It was an admirable response - unfortunate, but admirable.

None of the Camelodian forces on the Severn had sighted the Brigante yet, Kierhal was closing on the Teme and would soon be erecting a marching camp on its bank, nestling into a loop near the junction of the two rivers. Caionac was marching north having discovered that Venutius had left a garrison at Riverdown and taken his main force north between the Malverns and the Severn's right bank, but Caionac took the western side of the hill range and remained in concealment.

As he drew level with the valley between the two major hills, Caionac sent a signaller and a pack horse with the semaphore boards up the flank of the old hill fort, to gain intelligence of Venutius. There were only three hours of good light left and decisions to be made. He desperately needed to be sure that Venutius had continued up river and had not selected a battleground in the narrow firm land between the hills and the swamps that stretched away to the Severn. Venutius may not know where the Camelodians were, but if he had any sort of clue at all to the route they had taken from Riverdown, Caionac could find himself in a nasty position. He had been told by a shepherd, picked up on the march, that the land between Malvern and the swamps was little more than half a mile wide in places. Venutius's eleven thousand could fill up that space very easily and prevent any cavalry attack on their flanks. The army would lose one of its biggest advantages, the mobiles would still be of use, but since the prince had had experience of their operation before, he might well have found a counter for them; wagons loaded with bracken for instance,

pushed ahead of columns of men. Without the protection of the cavalry they could not launch flank attacks on the columns.

He waited impatiently for the signals to reach the heights and then, just as impatiently for the information to be transmitted to him. When it arrived he was not sure whether it was good or disappointing, on the one hand, part of Venutius's army had crossed the river and was out of reach, on the other hand, the rest were proceeding north still, but very cautiously. There was no possibility of the Brigante main force reaching the Teme before night fall.

A quick conference with his tribunes and centurions resulted in the surveyors being sent off to locate a camping ground for that night, and the cavalry trotting on ahead to begin the work. It all had to be done out of sight of the Brigante and still be within easy striking distance when Venutius advanced clear of the shielding Malverns. The infantry started work on the camp two hours later. The army had rounded the northern end of the range and followed a trackway that the surveyors had marked through beechwoods, taking them a little south again. The camp was set out within the woods, but within a stone's throw of a long slope of heathland leading north east into the elbow of the Teme and Severn. There were no fires that night, cold meat and bread - and no use of horns or cornetuses, but Venutius's fires could be seen to the south east, his army had travelled more slowly and camped earlier.

Morning saw the camp palisade poles withdrawn from the summit of the ditches, cleaned and piled onto the carts, the legionaries fed - cold food again - and ready armoured. Armour had not been scoured for three days now and a disheartening layer of rust dulled the surface of everything except the blades, but it no longer gleamed when caught by the rising sun and that was the object of the exercise.

Venutius was slow to start his march again, he was puzzled and troubled by the inability of his scouts to locate the main part of the Camelodian army, but still believed them to be either to the north or in the woods to his east on the other side of the river. Convinced that the army had marched to Severnside, he was positive that not enough time had elapsed for them to have marched far to the west and now be anywhere nearby. They could only be north of the Teme or east of the Severn, probably in ambush as he had been.

The Brigantes slowly approached the Teme confluence.

"Tribune, they're within a couple of miles of the river, shouldn't we be following?"

But Caionac had learned a great deal since Septimus Causta had begun his regular lectures and exercises in battle tactics, "The dew is still on the ground, we wait until they are creating enough dust and then get down behind them. Ewan," The signals optio came to attention, "Get a couple of your pigeons ready and a message to Windubro telling them where we are and that we expect to make contact with Venutius's army about one hour before midday."

"Tribune." Ewan saluted and went to roust out the cages from the signals cart, there were only five pigeons left - he knew they should have had more, but twelve had gone with the force aimed at Cothi and he got what was left!

"As soon as we see them making dust, we cut down in that direction," His arm indicated a move slightly east of south, "moving into position in parties of a century only, keeping off the tracks as much as possible and on the grass to cut down our own dust. Infantry first, cavalry next and ballista last - simply because they are noisiest. No horn signals, visual only. There's a shallow ridge that runs from the hill to the Severn. It's only just discernible from here, but it should mask us until our battle formation is in place - and it lies only a few hundred yards behind the Brigante. Until we reach that dead ground we will have the cover of these woods. Does everybody understand that? Good! Make sure your officers know what is expected, and Piso, tell that clown who polished his helmet this morning to dump it in one of the carts - if he gets his head cut off, it's his own bloody fault.

"My signals will be with the standards, only cohort signals to be used, if every century starts waving flags it's bound to catch someone's eye. I reckon it'll be another half hour or so."

It was a fair estimate, there was a clear sky and the April sun rapidly dried out the ground so that a cloud of dust soon rose behind Venutius's concentrated forces.

Just two things pleased Venutius at that moment, the weather and dry ground to march over and the surprisingly good formation that his groups of warriors were maintaining. Since each group numbered a hundred there was a superficial resemblance to a Roman army on the march. Rows of ten groups, each group forming three ranks looked, at first sight, very much like cohorts advancing cross country. A closer inspection revealed the constant attention that Venutius's officers were having to give to keep that formation from breaking down into groups of chattering warriors. However, he had obtained as much discipline as he could expect and, on the whole, it pleased him.

What was nagging at his brain was the whereabouts of the Camelodian army. The Teme was in sight - and the small fortified encampment that had been made in a loop of the river close to the confluence. It was well sited, a palisade had been built across the neck of the loop and doubtless would prove to be a considerable defence when he could see it close to, and the outer curve of the river bank was extremely marshy. He knew the range of the ballista they had there and he had no intention of floundering through marshes and river under bombardment. Which, logically enough left the palisade and ditch as the point of attack.

But it was obvious now, at a half mile distance, that there certainly was nothing like the number of men in the little camp that he knew had come down the Severn road. Although his scouts told him that there was no sign of any large body of troops having passed through the eastern woods (and no signs either going west from where the Camelodians had crossed the Severn), or that they had bypassed his own army and were now close to, possibly in, Riverdown. He had left four hundred men there and even though he had strengthened the walls and ditches, he was quite sure his garrison could not withstand an assault by disciplined men and ballista. Caught on the horns of a dilemma, he halted on the fringes of the marshy ground up river from the encampment on the Teme and waited while more scouts searched east and west for the elusive Camelodians, or the signs of their passing.

Suddenly he decided that he was not going to wait for the scouts return before he made his decision. There were four thousand men on the other side of the Severn five miles back - at the time it had seemed a reasonable thing to dosplitting his forces to deal with the uncertainty of the Camelodian presence. Now he was nervous about it, things he had been fairly certain of were clearly not so - in fact he was floundering in the dark.

"Get a messenger off to Lord Brendon, they are to cross the river and join us immediately." That felt better - it would feel even more so when the other group appeared on his side of the Severn. In the meantime he could wait for the reports of his scouting parties without taking any risks.

Half an hour later the Camelodian force was nearly ready to advance over the ridge and descend on Venutius's rear. The light cavalry was arranged in four ranks in front, behind them the infantry sandwiched seventy ballista columns five machines wide and the heavy cavalry formed wings on either side in traditional pattern.

"Have they seen us yet?"

"Not yet tribune, but there's a lot of restlessness at the back with horsemen trotting to and fro looking back in our direction." Caionac had only one scout on the top of the ridge to minimise the chance of being discovered.

"What's the matter with them? I was hoping to get closer than this before we were spotted. It won't matter I suppose, if the light infantry are as effective as Aiden boasted, but .."

"Tribune! Tribune!"

"For Lugh's sake stop that man shouting, someone."

The man was sweating mightily having just leapt off his horse and run the last fifty yards to his commander's position.

"Yes, man. What's the matter?"

"Brigante, tribune. Crossing the river back there - I saw them as I was coming down from the hill." It was one of the signal party camped on the flank of the old earthworks to make sure that the Brigante did nothing surprising. Apparently they had. Caionac mentally promised Mana, goddess of war and a warrior's sure protection, a gold crow. Just a few minutes more and his small army would have been exposed to the enemy in front with the imminent prospect of being attacked from the rear less than an hour later. They would have beaten the larger force, but been in poor shape to face an unexpected attack by four thousand fresh warriors. Almost certainly they would have been caught partially disarmed, pinioning prisoners and gathering spoils.

He shook his head and blew his cheeks out in relief, "That's why the Brigante's are looking towards us, they are expecting to see the rest of their army."

"How far away, man?"

"Four or five miles Tribune and they were still crossing when I saw them about half an hour ago."

"Four thousand men crossing a river, I doubt they've done it very often. They're using rafts and boats?"

"Just rafts, tribune."

Standing just below the brow of the ridge, he surveyed the ground behind them. "Four or five miles?" He confirmed.

"Yes tribune..... And they're building cooking fires."

Slowly a grin spread over what had been a shocked expression just a minute before, "Of course they are, Venutius is expecting a large body of warriors to reinforce him in ... What? ..A couple of hours? Maybe longer. And that army that has just crossed the river, they are expecting to see Venutius and they shall. Now, see how the woods follow the foot of the hills, that would cover us from Venutius's lookouts until we get beyond that next ridge. We are going to greet Venutius's reinforcements. When we are behind the ridge, the army will assemble with the light cavalry on their shaggy little Brigante horses in front. Heavy cavalry will march dismounted and the ballista will keep out of sight in the rear. Apart from our other advantages we outnumber them considerably - it should not take long. Then, gentlemen with booty and captives secured we collect Celtic shields and helmets and we march back to greet Venutius. I strongly suspect he will not be expecting us. Caducan."

"Tribune?"

"Make sure your light cavalry know what we expect of them and then send them off with their centurions and come back here. "We'll discuss actual battle dispositions as we march. So, staff will consist of Caducan, light cavalry; Cano, ballista; Ingus, infantry; Orcantel, heavy cavalry. Lead off, go gently, and keep the dust down."

The march through the woods was surprisingly easy, the locals (probably from Riverdown), had been felling the more mature timber so that while juvenile trees formed a screen on the edges there was a wide swathe of tree stumps that allowed easy passage for all, but the ballista. After half a mile they headed towards the river, cleared the trees and marched directly towards the Brigante. Two miles passed before they were sighted, a disorderly rabble, that had lost all semblance of military discipline during the crossing - a swamped raft or two had not improved matters and they were more like a crowd heading for a feast. The ranks of light cavalry on their small horses looked like Brigante to them, no-one gave thought to the fact that Venutius only had a couple of hundred cavalry altogether. At one hundred yards, the cheerful shouts of greeting died away as it dawned on the rabble that there were several thousand armed men behind the screen of light cavalry. The cavalry trotted forward a few yards and the first rank turned sideways onto the Brigante. They were recognised now as mere boys, lads of twelve to fourteen and

laughter broke out amongst the leading warriors. Steadily the Brigante closed on the front rank until at seventy yards the command was given and two hundred bolts were unleashed from the hand ballistas.

The front rank of light cavalry immediately turned through another ninety degrees and trotted back through the ranks while the next two hundred ballistas were raised, aimed and loosed. Utter chaos resulted, at seventy yards, the bodkin pointed bolts cut through shields and armour and did tremendous damage. The action was so smooth, well rehearsed and quick that all eight hundred cavalry had done their work and trotted off behind the infantry before a man could count to thirty. Those warriors deeper in the ruck were unaware of what precisely had happened, they saw men collapsing in front, but had no idea why, and then the heavy cavalry scythed through the left and right wings (or at least the mob where wings should have marched), while the infantry parted to allow the ballista through. A groan went up from the crowd for there were many men who had seen them before - and a greater number who had been told of the destruction they dealt. There was time for no more than three discharges and then the army turned and fled and the unblooded infantry were left baffled, in possession of the field, while the cavalry cut out small groups of warriors and pinioned them with the iron shackles, right wrist to left ankle. As a battle it left much to be desired.

No more than three hundred men were captured - there were more than twice that number dead or seriously wounded; Brendon's body was discovered amongst those killed by the light cavalry. It took longer to recall the cavalry, make arrangements for the booty and prisoners and reassemble as an army again.

Caionac ordered a half hour for food and rest before marching back towards the Teme, his front ranks now a mixture of light cavalry and infantry men carrying Celtic shields and wearing a variety of plaid cloaks and bronze helmets. It was an easy march - there was no reason to hurry and after an hour and a half Venutius's encampment was seen. It was exactly that now - an encampment - with the whole army split up into small groups around camp fires, and the only hint of any military order, a line of pickets guarding the Teme bank against assault from the other side. Those pickets were careful to keep at least five hundred yards from Kearhal's ballista - set out neatly and threateningly along the curve of the opposite bank. Apart from that thin line of armed men, the rest of Venutius's army appeared to be either sitting or lying down.

"Confident aren't they?" Caionac and the tribunes of the four arms of the legion were lying on the top of the ridge that they had occupied three hours before. There were only four

Celtic Empire - Camelod

hours of daylight left, but the condition of the enemy encouraged them to believe that the whole business could easily be managed in that time.

"Cano, see how they are spread? About four hundred yards with scattered parties on the fringes attending to horses, moving wagons or simply walking about. I suppose there's seventy to a hundred yards from the nearest to the pickets along the river. There is a heavy concentration just over there," He pointed to a position more or less opposite the Camelodian camp on the other side, "I'd guess that that is where Venutius and his chieftains are conferring - or sleeping. They're within range of the onagers aren't they?"

"Yes commander."

"Yes, I thought so. What I want you to do is fill three fire bolts for each ballista and keep the rest in the pots. How many pots will that give us?"

It was not a calculation that could be made immediately, but after a few minutes, while discussion of the placing of the cavalry and infantry went on around him, Cano produced an answer, "About ten pots commander."

"How big are those pots anyway? Would they fit the cups of the onagers?"

Cano indicated that the clay pots were about eighteen inches high, "They'll sit on the onagers comfortably commander."

"Excellent. Well when the light cavalry have discharged two volleys from each rank, ten onagers will lob pots of arboroleum right into that concentration, follow that up with fireballs if necessary, but I think the cooking fires will serve to ignite them. I want the ground absolutely soaked with the stuff right where Venutius is having his afternoon nap and, at the same time the bolts will be used against the shields of the front ranks. The infantry will move forward as soon as you have ceased the barrage and the cavalry will roll up the flanks towards the conflagration in the centre. If you see anywhere useful for the ballista to throw their solid bolts then do so, but be careful of the cavalry. Caducan."

"Yes commander?"

"Your boys are to retire to the rear as soon as they have discharged their second volleys - I don't think they'll be needed again, but hold them ready with hand ballista's loaded, just in case."

Caionac looked back at the front ranks of his army, they were a motley collection of boys on small horses and legionaries wearing cloaks, Celtic helmets and carrying round shields, "We're ready, don't marshall the light cavalry until they are within fifty yards."

They moved off, waving their shields and effectively hiding the rest of the army from view. Slowly the enemy became aware of them, but showed no particular interest; there was a little more activity around the cooking fires as men made sure of their own share of the roast before the newcomers arrived, but nothing more. As the moment for the light cavalry's attack drew near Caionac had sited himself on the left flank where he could see a large part of the front line, and he had a momentary qualm of conscience as the moment drew near. It was going to be a slaughter, there was only a hundred yards between the two armies and the Brigantes were totally unaware of any danger. He watched, intent upon the front rank riding ever closer to the fifty yard line. They halted, the infantry amongst them drew back and immediately the ranks of cavalry were steady, they loosed their bolts in the same manner as before, trotting to the rear of the fourth rank to reload as the second rank made their own assault. In just a few minutes the last of sixteen hundred bolts had slashed into the Brigante, who were only just now climbing to their feet and raising shields and weapons. The cavalry rode away and while the nearest warriors were still trying to organise a defence the mobile ballistas loosed the firebolts.

No-one had ever seen the result of these weapons before. They struck, shield or armor or flesh and while the wooden shaft bounced away the narrow iron head pierced whatever it had hit without being slowed appreciably and carried on its murderous way for another two or three victims. The old heavy bolts had created much the same damage, but what was new and totally horrifying was the jet of liquid and vapour that followed in its wake and burst into a ball of flame as soon as it was ignited by a nearby cooking fire or fireball. There was only a small amount of fluid in the wooden shafts, no more than three or four cupfuls, but the shock of the impact and then the internal iron weight slamming forward, produced a jet that was more than three quarters vapour and highly flammable. It was the presence of so many cooking fires that made it so fearsome, if ignition had had to wait on the fireballs lobbed over as was originally envisioned, the vapour would have evaporated or at least condensed to fall to the ground and produce flames; terrifying enough for the purpose, but not as horrendous as the sight of men suddenly engulfed in a cloud of flame.

Behind the front line, right at the centre of the camp ten pots of arboroleum had landed in the midst of the concentration of warriors and even without the vaporising effect had produced a fire that added to the panic. The army was defeated before the ballistas had exhausted their firebolts and switched to the standard bolt, in less than a quarter of an hour it had become a milling crowd of semi-armed men who had one idea only and that

was to flee, the flames, the bolts and the heavy cavalry that now cut deep into them from both flanks. The total panic almost brought catastrophe to the cavalry themselves, the charge petered out in the middle of the frantic, crowd of six or seven thousand and had the utmost difficulty in finding their way back - had there been any organised response at all, it would have been impossible. As it was, they suffered the only Camelodian casualties of the battle - or slaughter, thirty five men trampled to death.

Caionac could not stand the sight any longer, no Brigante he could see was making any attempt to fight back, "Sound the recall, for Lugh's sake - then the cavalry can cut out groups of warriors and the infantry round them up." He watched, the twin emotions of triumph and disgust warring within him, as terrified men were driven out of their huddle and then pinioned by the infantry. All weapons had been dropped or thrown away, shields and helmets discarded to signal total surrender. It was going to take a long time, there were at least five thousand unwounded men.

"Form into a line four deep." Even that took time, but it allowed his own forces to deal with the prisoners as a mass without fear of being surrounded. The light cavalry were deputed to apply the shackles while the cavalry and infantry shepherded the line. Half an hour more saw the job done, but there were the wounded to attend to. Two medico teams had accompanied Caionac and there was another in Kearhal's decoy detachment. He was about to send a messenger across the river when he realised that Kearhal's men were already crossing and his medicos had been among the first across. He did not care to look at their work to carefully, burnt flesh both looked and smelt sickening.

"Commander. We have Venutius."

"What! Where?"

It was Ingus, tribune of infantry and the man most involved in organising the security of the prisoners, "Yes, Commander. Back there. He is wounded, but not seriously - knocked unconscious by a potsherd from the bombardment."

"Can he walk?"

"Oh yes. I'll have him brought over, shall I?"

"Indeed yes, but Ingus." He stopped the man from dashing off again, "... no shackles, Venutius is a prince after all - and despite his defeat this afternoon, a competent general.

Treat him with courtesy." He had a couple of three legged camp stools brought to him from the carts and sat down waiting for the prince.

It did not take long and then he gestured to the other stool. Venutius looked haggard, with a livid bruise on his forehead, accentuating his pallor.

"Sit down, please Venutius, you don't look well."

A surprised look greeted that and then the prince burst out laughing, to Caionac's own surprise there was nothing hysterical about the laughter, but a deep, full bellied laugh that shook the sturdy frame for some moments before he gasped out, "Don't look well! I've just lost several thousand men, been pelted with ballista bolts and fire and you say I don't .." And he broke off into laughter again.

Caionac waited for him to gain control of himself again. "Tomorrow, I am marching to Riverdown, it will save everybody a lot of trouble if you come with us and order your garrison to surrender. Otherwise .. There is no shortage of arboroleum - or the bolts to deliver it."

"Arboroleum? Wood oil. That's what you call it." There was no laughter now, his memories were too close to that terrible experience for that, "Of course they must surrender. There's only four hundred of them anyway." Pausing he ran his eyes over his interlocutor critically. "You are very young to be a legate, but then all Windubro's soldiers seem to be very young."

"Not simply Windubro, Venutius. Our land is called Camelod - you must have heard," Venutius nodded, "And I'm not a legate, that's a permanent rank. My rank is senior tribune with command of this army - and of the one that is probably breaking down the gates of Cothi right now."

Venutius's dismay showed only too plainly, there had been a faint hope that if he could escape he would find sanctuary and the restoration of his fortune in that goldmine. He sighed and it seemed that this was his final acceptance of defeat, "Tell me, how do you know what is happening sixty, seventy miles away? Have you druid seers with you?"

"No prince, just pigeons, an efficient set of courier stations and the semaphore."

"Ah yes, the semaphore. They had something like that in Rome when I went there as a lad, but I hadn't thought of pigeons." For a moment neither of them spoke and then he

Celtic Empire - Camelod

said, "There was a lot that I didn't think of. I couldn't be expected to really ... Where in the names of all the Gods do you get these weapons?"

Caionac smiled, "We don't 'get' them, prince. Camelod invents and builds its' own weapons, develops its' own industries. You'll see for yourself in a few day's time."

Bushy eyebrows rose in mock surprise, "I'm not to be executed then?"

"I really don't know, that is General Lucius and King Gregory's decision."

"King Gregory?"

"He doesn't acknowledge the rank, but we do." Caionac's tone was hard, he would not accept the slightest denigration of the Lord of Camelod, implied or not.

The prince retreated suddenly from the subject, "Your pardon, commander.

"You said that Camelod invents and builds its' own weapons and industries, but where did you find your men of knowledge in this land? I've seen no evidence of any."

"You probably walked over them Venutius and never noticed. Apart from master Heron, all our 'men of knowledge' were simple men a few years ago. Somehow, King Gregory has the power to make ordinary men find unsuspected skills within themselves. Look at my officers. Look at me, I'm twenty seven years old with an army at my command and the use of weapons that no other army in the world possesses. Eleven years ago I was more or less owned by a Corittani noble, I lived with my parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and cousins in a mud hut and I spent my time picking stones out of the lord's fields, or herding goats, or scaring off foxes from the chicken pens. Then I was recruited to Windubro's legion - we mainly take lads because they are easier to train properly."

"I know," Interjected the prince with considerable feeling.

"I guess you do too. The point is, that without the Lords Gregory and Lucius, none of that would have happened. I'll show you my house when we get back to Windubro - and don't worry, I doubt that the King will have you executed." Venutius was only encouraged a little by this opinion, he knew what his own actions would have been in dealing with someone who had caused as much trouble as he had. He gave a mental shrug - it was up to the Gods, he turned his attention back to Caionac who was elaborating on his possessions in Camelod.

" my house is built partly of wood, partly of stone. It has three public rooms downstairs, an atrium, kitchens, a small private bath house and a courtyard, where I can sit with my wife and children sheltered from any winds. Upstairs, a suite of rooms for my family and I - and rooms for visitors. I have wealth invested with traders in Cantodunon and bankers in Gaul, only one hundred and fifty thousand sesterces as yet, but growing - and my pension fund in the legion's coffers. I am a wealthy man, Venutius and although I am young, my king gives me the authority you see around you, to wage war, collect prisoners and booty, make some minor agreements with local chieftains on behalf of Camelod. It is far from my boyhood of picking stones out of an inefficiently managed field."

He realised that his voice had risen, he was not quite shouting, but there was more enthusiasm than was quite seemly, "I suspect that you have had many such as I working on your possessions in the Brigante lands. Were you like my king, you would have seen what you had in your labourers and serfs - and we would not be sitting here like this."

Venutius was thinking. The amount of gold dug from the earth at Cothi was now about half a million sesterces, which of course, would fall to the Camelodian victors, but even without that ill fortune more than half of it would have had to be distributed to his chieftains to maintain their loyalty. This young man was equally wealthy - **and** he lived a civilised life in Windubro.

It was Caionac who broke the silence as the prince brooded, "Windubro will receive my news before full nightfall and orders will arrive here just after midday - also news of Cothi, I hope." The grin he gave Venutius was more than a little malicious, the man was an enemy after all and Caionac did not believe that he would have been treated as humanely had things gone the other way. If, for instance, he had not been told of the second force behind them until after they had attacked Venutius.

"Give me your oath that you will not try to escape and you can have a tent to yourself tonight and a decent meal."

"And hot water?"

"But certainly."

"You have my oath, then." Nevertheless, he was certain that a careful watch would be kept on his tent. He got to his feet stiffly, and managed to avoid pressing his hands to his aching back.

"Optio Brendon will show you to a tent and have food and hot water brought to you."

"Brendon? The head of the detachment that was coming to join me here was called Brendon. How is he?"

"The commander of that force was killed, I'm afraid. We don't know his name."

"It would be Brendon." Tears began to run down his cheeks, "It is a great pity. He was a man who served me since I was a youngster, faithful, completely loyal - and, I suspect my only surviving friend. Forgive me." He turned on his heel and blindly walked into the waiting optio.

Caionac watched them go. Against his inclination he had been impressed by Venutius, the man was handsome, but more than that he had a certain charm. Senior tribune Caionac, supposed that that fact should be obvious to him, the prince had survived at least two catastrophic encounters with Camelod before this last calamity. He must have a well developed ability to draw men to him. Ah well, see what the midday brought in the way of orders in the meantime!

"Messenger! See that my tribunes understand that we will assemble the prisoners at first light, feed them and then start off for Riverdown."

"Yes, commander."

"I'm turning in, have something brought to my tent, please."

PROPERTY OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Chapter nineteen

Central Cambria

The Camelodians had crossed the Severn shortly after leaving the road. It was a slow river, deep but placid and the crossing produced no problems, it was a simple matter of swinging anchored rafts across the flow and then the two groups travelled another seven or so to the Teme where they split up. Jossoc took his group across the river accepting the help of the larger group with the engineering, as a consequence the smaller body was well on its way by sun down and they camped on the banks of the river Lugg - a propitious name for Camelodian troops. The country sloped gently upwards through woods which were broken regularly by small settlements joined by rutted cart tracks. A particular problem for the ballista was the state of these tracks and it was soon realised that the woodland on either side of the track was an easier and faster route. It consisted mainly of beech, the smooth grey trunks well spaced and the brush between kept to a minimum by the herds of pigs that normally rooted there. Pigs that remained as invisible as the human population. Both cavalry and ballista centuries took to the woods, while the infantry kept to the track.

The swift passage of over seven hundred men around these small centres of population created a natural consternation in the locals - armoured infantry and heavy cavalry had never been seen before - but raiders had and panic was a feeble word to describe the initial impact on the people. The order to march silently when the settlements were approached soon proved to be a mistake and aggravated the situation, it gave the column a grim, purposeful air that was more intimidating than the initial clatter and chatter of the troops. Mostly, the people of the first few villages made themselves scarce, only the occasional curious face peering around a hut or byre betrayed the fact that these places were still inhabited, but when the fifth was reached the word had obviously gone forward that the strangers were harmless - or at least, were causing no harm. By the time the river Lugg was reached and the camp erected, Jossoc and his officers were receiving useful information about the tracks and river valleys ahead, but the pigs still remained invisible.

Next day the route passed through a ridge where it was cut by a small river, bleak stony peaks rose to a height where they disappeared into the clouds that now kept them thoroughly doused in a heavy mist or drizzle - it was hard to tell which. It remained with them when they had negotiated the pass and moved onto a five mile stretch of short mountain turf and gorse and entered another, more confining pass that had the centurions scanning the rocky slopes on either side with keen suspicion. At one point the space between the hillside (steep enough to be rated as cliffs), was less than two hundred paces and if an ill-intentioned person had chosen to roll rocks down from the mist shrouded

Celtic Empire - Camelod

heights, there would have been no escaping them. Nothing untoward happened however, and they emerged intact from the pass and marched along a broad valley. They were into real hill country now, bleak crags, rounded hills with the soil abraded down to the fundamental stone by cruel winds and the uncaring hooves of sheep. Surprisingly lush little valleys appeared out of the grey veil that stretched over their heads and intermittently reached down to the track. It was bleakly wet - a thorough wetness that seemed to pervade the skin and deny the drill instructors' common words of comfort "Skin's waterproof lad, come on, enjoy it." Recruit training was well behind these men, but more than one would have been happy to see a DI enjoy this lot.

It was in these miserable conditions that they came across a sorry group of refugees. There were about thirty of them, men, women and children, initially fleeing from Venutius's slaving raids, but now simply travelling without much hope of ever finding a community that would accept them. This area was much travelled by the Ordovices and the southern Coritani, each individual valley prized and jealously guarded. Strangers were not welcome - certainly not poverty stricken strangers with no cattle or flocks, the inhabitants of these valleys had lost all semblance of compassion, not even extending the minimum of succour to the fugitives, who were starving when the cavalry came across them huddled under an overhanging rock face, sheltering from the cold, penetrating drizzle.

The Camelodians had plenty of rations with them and more in wagons a couple of days behind, so there was no difficulty in feeding the party and drying them out in front of camp fires.

"Where have you come from, then?" There were several cavalymen from the lower Severn area and sufficient resemblance between their native language and that spoken by the refugees that it was not difficult to communicate.

They pointed vaguely south west and spoke of raiders and, most clearly, the Cothi - the afon. There was no doubt that they had lived on or near the river Cothi. Before camp was established a more fluid communication had developed and it was swiftly agreed that in return for a guide to take them to Severnside and a new livelihood, one of the men would take the Camelodians over the hills to the valley so that they could approach the goldmine from the north - an approach that should remain undetected until they came down off the hillside. The group were provided with sufficient food to get them all to Severnside and they were sent on their way in the charge of an optio, whose steed now did fulltime service as a packhorse. The optio walked.

The following day the weather was a little dryer and, because of the guide's local knowledge, they found easier tracks. A ten hour march, during which they changed direction completely (swinging through almost three hundred and sixty degrees), brought them into the shelter of an ancient stone quarry - and their guide informed them that they were much less than an hour from their target, in fact Cothi was on the other side of the hill.

"What's the easiest place to view it from?" Jossoc wanted to know and their interpreter informed him that if they took to the sheep tracks on the hillside (now totally bare of sheep) they would be able to look down on it from a shoulder that loomed over the site and less than half a mile from it. A half hour later and Jossoc and his centurions were staring at a proliferation of spoil tips, three timbered tunnel mouths, a huddle of ramshackle hovels and about a hundred men, women and children, pushing, dragging or carrying burdens of soil and rock to a complex of wooden constructions built into a hillside stream. It should have been a busy scene, but the only quick, lively movements were being made by overseers with whips. The labour force was clearly in frail condition, so much so that the Camelodians could not help, but wonder where was the economic sense in feeding and housing slaves so badly that they could not work efficiently. Enclosing the area was a double palisade that curved from one side of the hill to the other and in the space between the two roamed six huge hounds, shaggy and seeming at this distance, to be at least hip height to a grown man.

"Over there." Jossoc's large hand indicated a fortification to the east of the mines. It was about a hundred yards on each side; like Windubro the walls were made of timber faced with earth and turves with battlements and short towers at each corner. There were two gate houses, properly constructed, but set at right angles to the walls they passed through, access to the gates was parallel to the walls themselves and there was a short, isolated wall shielding each gate. As a result the two walls that had gate houses were divided and each half offset. The arrangement made it nearly impossible to bombard the gates directly and any assault force would have to approach along the foot of the main fortress wall - where they would be under constant attack from the battlements.

Septimus Causta's lectures on defenceworks had never indicated such a manner of building.

"I don't fancy tackling the gates, primus." Declared Wyn, a centurion of infantry and, despite his name (handsome and fair), a dark, tubby man with a square, shaven head and coarse, numerous features.

Celtic Empire - Camelod

"No." Jossoc mused, "But I wonder how many men are inside the fortress. Apart from any other consideration there are four hundred yards of wall to defend.

"Did any of you notice? Beyond the fort there is a row of houses; they look quite large from here. Was that Venutius's idea d'you think or his Roman advisor?" He crawled back from the observation point until he could stand without his large frame drawing attention from below, and started to walk back to their camp. "Anurin, you and Wyn take charge of making camp, use all the men except twenty cavalry. Bodu take those men and make sure that nobody takes word to Cothi that we are near.

"Now, as soon as your orders have been given - no not you Bodu, I want you to take personal charge of the scouts, it's too vital to leave to an optio - as soon as you've given your orders we meet to discuss tactics. No fires tonight of course - and no meat - bread, cheese and watered wine only, I suspect that those dogs might easily smell hot meat or cold meat once it was being cut. The wind along this valley is cranky, first one way then the other. Have your own meal before the meeting, but go easy on the wine, I've got a small cask of a very good Spanish wine with me and we'll share that."

The staff meeting that night decided several matters, the first was that if they could possibly avoid it they would not attempt a straight forward assault on the walls, although ladders would be made that night for a combined attack. The second decision was that fire was their best ally. One of the infantry centurions, Anurin, had realised that the fort was overlooked by the hillside at a distance of no more than two hundred yards, sufficient to protect it against spears and arrows, but not the ballista. The third and final decision was that the fortress was to be taken first - it was obvious, but needed to be stated. The dogs would have to be killed, but that would only become necessary if they were loosed from the pallisades or when the mines were taken.

The ballista could not be driven over the rough ground and onto the hillside overlooking the fort in the dark - they had to wait until the next morning and lose the element of surprise. It was not an important matter. Even if they could have got them into position, no bombardment could begin until they could see the target and if there were efficient lookouts, the array of twenty ballista on the hillside could hardly be overlooked. The remaining twenty were placed around the fortresses other walls - on ground that was considerably smoother with a reasonable track that enabled most of these to be handled under cover of darkness. Inevitably there was noise and Jossoc soon realised that it had been a useless exercise.

Dawn broke as the first fire bolts were being filled ready for discharge - they had to be filled immediately before use because there was no way in which they could be prevented from slowly leaking their contents. It was while this process was being dealt with that the first small boulders landed amongst them. The fortress was equipped with catapults similar to onagers and four of them were set out along the top of the hillside wall.

They should have waited a little longer, the light was still not good and all four machines had missed their aim, but that could not be hoped for much longer.

"Oh Damn." Jossoc realised that the Roman advisor had been more than a mere diplomat, he did not stop to wonder what other surprises might await them though, "Link the horses and scatter up and along the hill." It was not an order that could be transmitted by horn and the relatively long winded process of assimilating the spoken message that was passed from unit to unit, resulted in delay and confusion. A fresh and better aimed volley from the fort smashed one ballista completely just as the horses were being linked to the trail and men and animals were sprayed with timber splinters and broken stone. Maddened, the animals tore free of their wounded handlers and ran wild along the hill damaging two more machines, their brief career came to an end when the one horse bled to death and collapsed, effectively anchoring its partner. A third volley landed just after the ballista had scattered and although there were near misses and minor casualties from stone and earth, no more machines were damaged..

The retreat was sounded and the remaining machines withdrew to assemble out of range and higher up the hill.

Jossoc joined the nearest, "Well that was a nice start to the day, eh? ... Now..... we should be out of their range here - are their weapons still within range of the firebolts?"

"I don't know primus."

"Well try the range and find out you idiot." Jossoc was an effective officer, but not given to hiding impatience or anger... He was angry right now, one ballista was a complete loss with its crew of three and two horses, and several of his men were wounded, but, he reminded himself, even if he was wrong about the range of the Brigante weapons, they had two advantages still, height and mobility. So long as the machines did not crowd together again, the crews were fast enough to line up their ballista, unhitch the horses, let off one shot and hitch up again before their opponents could get line and range on them.,

but they would not be able to concentrate their fire until the wall catapults had been disabled.

"Loosed, primus." The machine bucked after the discharge and Jossoc squinted down at the fort trying to find the bolt as it struck. It was low, the difference in height deceiving the crew's judgement of range. "Up fifty yards." Jossoc took over the direction of discharge, without apology to the crew's captain.

That bolt flew over the target and thumped into one of the wooden buildings inside the fortifications. Well, there was one target soaked in arboroleum, but it would have to await ignition until after they had dealt with the catapults. The next shot landed close enough to the Brigante catapults to spray the area with flammable liquid and Jossoc gave the order for all the ballista that could find a platform on this steeper part of hillside to bombard the weapons.

"I'll have twenty bolts on or around the two central catapults, but the ignition will have to be done by one or two of the infantry catapults, we'll never hit them with a fireball from here." The problem was that although the fireballs were much larger than the bolts, they were much lighter and wavered all over the sky - and it was extremely doubtful that they would reach the walls even from this elevation. Normal extreme range for a fireball flung from a field weapon was about two hundred yards. A messenger was sent off down the hill to Bodu who was to lead the attack on the fort when the ballista had softened up the defences.

The catapult attack on the ballista centuries had been seen by the cavalry and infantry, who were now drawn up opposite the gatehouses at a distance that Bodu had considered was beyond the range of the Brigante weapons. The plan had been for the hillside assault to shoot across the fort and lodge their firebolts in the two gates. It had been seen that only the outside of the walls had been clad with earth and turves, the inside of the walls was buttressed every twenty yards or so with rock, but for the main part it consisted of exposed timber - an easy target for the ballista, where it not for the surprising fact that the Brigante had catapults. Bodu shoved a lock of black curls back under his regulation helmet and waited to see how a bombardment would fare launched from the upper slopes of the hillside - and kept an eye on the gates, or rather the short length of wall that screened the gates, alert to any more surprises.

When Jossoc's message arrived the pattern on each side of the fortress was the same, two and a half centuries of infantry ranked three deep with a half century in reserve (small, but still useful in an emergency), a century of heavy cavalry on one flank of each grouping

covering the hillside wall and the gates, and on the other flank fifteen ballista and five onagers for throwing fireballs. So far they had done nothing, but simply sat there.

"Jossoc wants you to get onagers into range for throwing fireballs onto the hill wall and the catapults."

Bodu grimaced, the ballista centurions were not going to like that. Their catapults would be sitting target if there were more of the Brigante weapons. He sent for Finnan and Brennan and they spent a quarter of an hour walking about and scanning the ground between their present positions and the most promising platform for the onagers - less than one hundred and fifty yards from the wall. The onagers were heavier than the ballista and, if the Brigante had any more wall mounted weapons, it would be essential that they change position as rapidly as they could. The mounting of a fireball in the cup of the throwing arm was a relatively lengthy business compared with the bolts of a ballista. The shot was bulky, had to be lighted and be well alight before loosing - at the same time it was not a good idea to have it blazing away in the cup for too long before releasing it; the cup was lined with sheet iron, but the heat transferred through it very rapidly.

During this whole time, there was no activity to be seen on the walls and Jossoc was not the only one to suspect that something unpleasant was being prepared. It was imperative that the arboroleum be ignited soon, so that the machines on the hillside wall could be put out of action or rendered too uncomfortable to use. Then the mobiles could return to their original position and plan and set fire to the gates.

Jossoc's requirement of twenty loads of the inflammable liquid being landed on or around the central catapults had been exceeded by the time that four onagers made a dash for their separate platforms. They were immediately greeted by a fusillade of small darts, launched by scorpions - a small version of the ballista with a range of more than one hundred and fifty yards when the elevation of the walls was taken into account. There must have been six or seven of them, and their accuracy was enough to cause the onagers to swerve back out of range before there was any possibility of loosing a fireball.

"Damn, Damn, Damn!" This battle was proving very different to anything that Jossoc and his centurions had expected, in fact it had been solely an artillery duel so far. "Well, let's tackle it another way.

"Message to Bodu: Ten mobiles will join you, concentrate all weapons on the north wall (the fortress was built to the east of the hillside), and spray with fire bolts. Rig up mantlets for two onagers and then ignite the battlements." It would not damage the wall at all, it

was too well protected with turves for fire to get a hold on its face, but if the scorpions could be destroyed, the onagers would be able to get within range of the eastern catapults that were holding everything up.

"Add to that message." A thought had just occurred to him, "One century of heavy cavalry and one of infantry to stand to just out of range of the scorpions." He turned to explain to his centurions, "We can see the gate from up here, but that screen wall allows them to assemble warriors out of sight of Bodu and make ready for a swift raid on the onagers, tell him that three blasts on the horn will give warning if the gate opens." His hand suddenly tightened on the shoulder of the man taking his messages down. "Look!"

Jossoc pointed down the slope to a position a little lower than the original site for the onagers, "With a bit of quick work those boulders can be levered up to form a defence for our own onagers - we can get a couple of them over there easily. Get this message off and then tell Anurin to see about those boulders, and Wyn is to move two onagers there. Quick man, quick!" And he settled back on a rock with something like satisfaction, "Tha..at's better."

The messages arrived as the bombardment of the wall began - a bombardment that intensified when the additional ballista arrived from the hill. Thirty or forty bolts had soaked the battlements and fighting platform and two infantry onagers were already fitted with clumsy, but effective mantlets on wheels to shield the horses and men from the scorpions. It greatly slowed them down, but that was not important - although they were a tempting target for a sortie as they moved at walking pace across the rough ground. Whoever was the commander of the garrison, had clearly noted that and decided that a swift attack from the concealment of the gate house and its flanking wall would be effective. Three sharp blasts from the hillside warned that Jossoc's anticipation of their enemy's next move had been correct and the gate was opening. The sudden signal must have told the Brigante that the imminent attack was no longer concealed, but their answer was simply to speed the deployment of warriors through the gate.

"Someone's been giving them lessons." Complained Fingal as he and Brennan prepared to move the infantry in support of the cavalry. The scorpions had swiftly turned their attention to the widely spaced lines of horsemen, leaving the onagers to plod across the rough ground, while they sought to remove the threat to their own sortie. It was a surprisingly large force that rushed from the shelter of the gate wall, not maintaining its formation well and with no uniformity of armour and weapons, but very dangerous. Scorpion bolts were still being discharged against the cavalry, but their spacing minimised the effectiveness of the weapons, speed of loading and firing seemed to be the main

concern, not accuracy and there were few casualties before the closing space between cavalry and Brigante forced the scorpions to stop.

A cavalry cornitos immediately sounded a command and the horsemen broke into a trot, closing their ranks as they went until the lances were a menacing wall bearing down on the loose formation of men who had emerged from the gatehouse. Behind them, the infantry moved at a rapid march on an oblique line that cut behind the cavalry and between the sortie and the mobiles. The Brigante had halted in the face of the cavalry charge and, with a little clumsiness that betrayed insufficient practice formed a shield wall braced by the first two ranks. It was inelegant, but it sufficed to break the power of the charge, the line was broken in only two places and the three or four cavalymen that forced their way through were rapidly brought down. The cavalry wheeled away, no shield breakers had been issued for the campaign and lances were all but useless against a firm shield defence.

But the defence against the cavalry had exposed the flank to the Camelodian infantry and the mobiles. Bodu recognised the opportunity and signalled the ballista to change targets from the wall to the mass of Brigante warriors that were still presenting a shield wall to the cavalry. The iron bolts were discharged at no more than fifty yards and cut deeply into the crowded sortie which heaved and shrank away from the weapons. The shield wall collapsed, and the cavalry, taking a chance with the occasional bolt that skipped across the edges of the massed warriors, charged obliquely, slicing off a body of fifty or so from the main group and then turning to splinter it still further into individuals, that had no defence against the lances and swords. Infantry centurions waved their lines forward and signifers flagged the 'trot'. Almost every man had a taut grin on his face as they advanced at a pace that would carry the iron line a hundred and fifty yards in a minute. They had barely got into their stride and realigned the line when matters changed abruptly.

Once again, the Brigante garrison revealed a greater degree of discipline than expected; a horn command from the walls created an untidy withdrawal, exposing the mobiles to attack from the scorpions again, relieving the warriors of one assault immediately and allowing the reconstruction of the shield wall against the Camelodian cavalry. The infantry was called to a scowling halt and then marched well away from the ground covered by the scorpions bolts.

Bodu and Finnan watched the warriors disappear behind the wall, the cavalry had killed or wounded a large number of Brigante, but lost twelve of their own men in the engagement.

"Jossoc won't be pleased."

"You know what Jossoc can do." Finnan was aggrieved that the Brigante were showing something of the same attributes that the Camelodian legion had developed over the years, "When's he going to ignite those catapults on the western wall and get on with the original plan?"

Bodu gripped his arm and pointed at two arcs of smoke that terminated just short of the wall, "Does that answer your question?, but Finnan." His voice lowered so that the men around them could not hear, "I only have temporary command down here, but I will not have you criticise the primus in public. Understand? Any repetition and you'll be standing outside the Principia office with a headquarters guard flanking you and waiting to answer for it. Do you understand?"

Finnan blinked, for the moment he had forgotten that Bodu was in acting command and impatience had made his voice louder than he realised, "My apologies, commander. I forgot myself, it won't happen again."

"Good, well it's no great matter and I'm as pleased as you are to see that smoke. What I next want to see is .. Ha! There it is!"

A second throw from the onagers had been more accurate than the first and flames could be seen even from this side of the fort, leaping above the crenelated wall. "That's quite a blaze. How many bolts did they land up there I wonder?"

The bombardment of the catapults with firebolts had continued while the small battle on the lower ground was being fought out and, judging from the height of the flames, the fighting platform on the western wall must have been swimming in arboroleum.

Finnan caught Bodu's attention, "They can't have many bolts or fire water left, Bodu. Can we send more up to them? Our own onagers are nearly in position now and with that blaze as an example I don't think the men on this wall are going to wait for us to do the same to them."

"You're right. Thank you."

Four cavalry horses were transformed into packhorses to transport bolts and clay pots of arboroleum to Jossoc's position. The mobiles there had already changed the point of aim and the first fire bolts were hammering into the southern gate, which now had only a century of infantry besieging it. Men rushed to the gate, but clearly had no obvious remedy for the attack that they recognised was about to be made there, in a very short time the

inside of the gate and the surrounding fighting platform was soaked in the flammable liquid and in anticipation of ignition the Brigante drew away from it. Several minutes passed before the first of the fireballs arced over from the northern side where Bodu's onagers were no longer threatened by defenders on that wall. The whole of that platform was completely unusable for defence and in two places had crashed to the ground. Signals from the hillside directed the aim of the onagers and ignition was achieved after five fireballs had been flung across the width of the fort from position close up to it. Immediately their success was signalled they drew back for the only way out of the fortress was the northern gatehouse and it could not be long before the remaining garrison made use of it. Flames rose from three sides and had caught on the buildings that had taken hits from errant firebolts so that there was a widespread conflagration that was beyond any hope of extinguishing. The fortress was fast becoming untenable. The infantry made ready, each man poised to trot towards whichever gate was used for evacuation - they were to be frustrated almost immediately the possibility seemed imminent.

A man appeared at the top of the northern gatehouse, cast his shield and sword to one side and stood with arms upraised. There was no belligerent activity at all on this side at the moment, Bodu was waiting for the inevitable final battle when the Brigante evacuated the burning fort, cavalry, ballista and infantry drawn up in readiness and eager as hunting dogs.

"I think he wants to talk commander." Finnan was being very punctilious and a brief smile flickered across Bodu's face.

"Good. It could save us a great deal of trouble - we know he must have at least three hundred men in there. Send a messenger over as herald. They can have their lives if they come out with no weapons."

"What if he wants assurances that they won't be sold as slaves?"

"We'll see., but if they want their lives, they leave now with no conditions."

Bodu watched as the message was conveyed, replied to and then the question they had foreseen was put. Nothing could be heard, but the gestures were plain enough and eventually the man on the gatehouse turned, obviously gave orders to open the gate and then disappeared from view. The attack from the hillside ceased and the Camelodians waited upon events.

Celtic Empire - Camelod

At least five hundred men trooped out of the fortress, most of them with faces blackened with soot - quite a large number with burnt clothing. Last of all strode the man they had seen on the top of the gatehouse, but clad now in a magnificent cloak, a massive gold torc around his neck and a round, gilded helmet on his head. While a party of infantry, two centuries strong, marched through the gate to check that the town was deserted, the Brigantes were rounded up and their wrists shackled. Their leader ignored this, but marched directly up to where Bodu was standing, nobody thought to prevent him.

"You are the chief of these men?"

Bodu shook his head and looked curiously at the man, "No, but primus Jossoc will be here shortly," Pointing to the hillside at the file of ballista that was carefully descending to the level of the fort, "What is your name, please? You fought well, and the primus will want to offer you proper courtesy."

The man gave a rueful laugh, "We would have been more successful if you had not had those weapons of fire."

"Undoubtedly, but then we **did** have them - and if we hadn't, we would simply have surrounded the fortress until you starved. It comes to the same thing in the end - this is just a lot quicker and much less trouble for everybody." The man raised well defined eyebrows at this casual acceptance.

"My name is Rhodri, but you have a peculiar outlook on warfare young man." That was probably justified thought Bodu as he studied his captive. He was tall, wellbuilt with a breadth of shoulder that was made the more impressive by his cloak and almost the equal of Jossoc. A short, clipped beard broadened a sharp chin and blue eyes stared truculently down at the centurion; it was a powerful, intelligent face with a broad forehead that disappeared beneath the skull cap in a manner that hinted he was either bald or nearly so. Bodu thought that he must be close to forty years old.

Jossoc rode up to them and was introduced. Rhodri was impatient with them though, "My men. What do you intend to do with them?"

"That is up to our general, chief. You could make matters easier for them if you ordered the guards of the mine to release the slaves and lock up those hounds before we have to kill them."

Rhodri smiled briefly, "You will have to kill the dogs anyway, nobody can handle them, they live in that paddock between the palisades - the mine complex is entered by a small gateway - a sort of tunnel - that passes through. We feed them just enough to keep them healthy and anxious for more."

"Well, you see to the surrender of your men and we'll see to the dogs. They're half starved d'you say? I mean the hounds." He accepted Rhodri's brusque nod and called across to one of the ballista centurions. "Fingal, there's at least one horse dead on the field, cut a good hunk out of it, station four ballista where they can shoot at the same area in that compound between the pallisades and then toss the meat into their point of aim. I would think four bolts will take care of half a dozen hounds. Don't you Rhodri?" He got another nod. Ah well, Jossoc thought, the chieftain can't be altogether happy at the moment, he's been defeated without ever really getting to grips with us. In fact, he mused, it was hardly a battle at all, there was the brief engagement with the cavalry and then the artillery brought it to an end. He wondered what Septimus Causta would make of it when they got back to Windubro. Tribune Causta liked to put descriptive names to the various battle tactics. What would he call this? 'Direct artillery suppression with cavalry support and infantry standby?' It was a wordy enough title for one of Caustas' scrolls.

Jossoc extracted Rhodri's oath and then sent him off in the charge of Brennan. They had most of the afternoon to confine the captives, attend to the wounded, settle and feed the slaves - and build a camp. The fortress was uninhabitable for the moment, flames roared up from the closely built hutments that had housed Venutius's army before he made his attack on Riverdown. The place would probably still be blazing hot in the morning. He had been walking across to the pallisades to see if the hounds were dead yet when a thought crossed his mind, he raised one finger in the air, "Ha!".

A surprised legionary stopped in mid-stride and waited anxiously for his commander to address him. Jossoc frowned a little and then gave his orders, "Find centurion Wyn ... Yes Wyn - he's not got a task at the moment. Tell him to take twenty reliable men and search the large houses over there." He pointed beyond the smoking fortress. Well that was done. Now to make a report and have it sent off by pigeon to Windubro, he gave a slightly self-satisfied smile and strode off to his tent and writing materials.

There was a strongroom in the largest house, almost certainly Venutius's, and when it was broken open, chests of silver coins (with Caligula's image), timber boxes of rough gold ingots and a small amount of gold and gem jewellery were revealed. Jossoc viewed it, had it carefully catalogued and then loaded into two carts - which were then boarded over and the boards nailed firmly in place. They would have to be dismantled before anyone saw

their contents again. The houses were well made, Venutius's in particular. It was built as a hollow square with a small garden at the centre, living rooms and kitchens surrounded it and a second storey had bedrooms and sitting rooms. A small slave or servant's quarter at the rear and a tiny, but servicable, bath house alongside. It was not as well equipped as Caionac's house in Windubro, but it **was** more splendid than his own - with the exception of the bath house that he shared with eight other primuses.

This was another of the surprising details about these Brigante - the fortress, artillery and trained men to work it, the quality of the houses and the civilised manner of Rhodri. His only knowledge of Brigante was hearsay and the example of the other British tribes that he had come in contact with - decent people he supposed, but not in the least bit sophisticated. Rhodri behaved as a tribune from Camelod might be expected to behave. He included some of that in the miniscule message that his scribe wrote onto a scrap of kidskin to wrap around the pigeon's leg. A few words only, of course, even kidskin could be too heavy if it was cut too large, but there was writing on both sides of the small square that rolled into a tube no longer than his fore finger to the first joint.

He watched the bird despatched and then settled down for a solitary meal; Jossoc needed to review all that he had learned today about the Brigante - he did not need the triumphant chatter of his officers and friends.

A courier arrived at sunset, weary, but not exhausted - his despatch was not marked urgent. Riverdown was occupied by the Camelodians again after Venutius had made good his promise and ordered the garrison to surrender. Bodu was ordered to await a team of surveyors who were establishing a route for a fully surfaced road from there to Cothi. He was to use his own men and the prisoners to build the road and could offer the Brigante their freedom in payment. The task was estimated to take a year, with hardened tracks leading off at points where iron was discovered or any other site where a settlement might usefully be set up. Since the road would run parallel to the twist and turns of the river Wye, there were likely to be a number of these. Any of the Brigante who decided to enlist as pioneers in the legion would be given citizenship after six months and paid according to the normal legionary ranks, and have the right to the citizen shares that were distributed every feast day. (Recent shares had amounted to seven hundred sesterces in the year 42. As a primus Jossoc received thirty shares.) It was, he mused, a very comprehensive set of instructions that headquarters had put together for the commander in the field. All neatly laid out - and it was going to involve him in a great deal of complicated chaffer with the mixed bag of warriors and nobles that he would have to assign temporary ranks to ... unless the principia clerks thought he was going to tie up all his junior officers in

administering road building and surveying tasks. They could think again if that was the case, there must be thousands of Brigante fugitives scattering across the land between here and the Severn. They'd be hungry, angry and on the look out for undefended farms and settlements - it would be the legion's job to try and nullify the danger to the civilian population. He swore to himself, glowered at his reflection in the bronze mirror hanging on the tent post and shouted for a camp messenger. Immediately the man showed his face Jossoc sent him off with an 'invitation' for Rhodri to come to his tent as soon as possible. Easy though the terms of his captivity were, the Brigante chief had no illusions about his situation; he appeared at the tent flaps immediately.

"Come in chief, sit in that chair and - do you read our language? It's based on Gaulish, but it can be difficult for one unused to it."

"I don't even read Latin, commander."

"Ah! Well I think that we will probably change that in the near future because I have the answer to the question you put to me earlier, about the fate of your men." He read the despatch through and then leaned back to watch for Rhodri's reaction."

"That's very generous," A broad smile changed his whole aspect. "Very generous, indeed. I'm sure that most of my men will make no trouble while they are building the road. And I think most will take the offer of citizenship and settle down in whatever settlements are made available to them."

"They'll be more like camps than settlements most of the time, but all our citizen legionaries have permanent homes - which the kingdom builds."

Rhodri gave a long laugh of pure joy, "They'll be better off than if we'd won that battle."

With a smile Jossoc acknowledged that in all probability they would, "They must give their oath to Lugh and accept him as chief of our Gods - and all male citizens are required to train for the town guard or legion, and defend the kingdom with their lives if necessary." He paused and then continued on a more serious note, "You should know that our laws are lenient and punishments humane - with one exception. The punishment for treachery is drowning or strangling. There has been no case of a citizen betraying his fellows in our short history, but make no mistake, King Gregory, mild mannered though he is, would insist upon the penalty if necessary."

Celtic Empire - Camelod

"He is right to do so, if any of my men went back on his oath after becoming a citizen, I would be among the executioners." Rhodri's face was bleak, "I would not forgive a traitor - and I would not expect any king I respected, to do so either."

Jossoc brought their meeting to an end then and Rhodri left the tent with a broad smile on his face, after first having permission from the primus to spread the news to his men. "Tell them that all men who give their oath to work with us and not escape, will have their shackles removed instantly."

"May I apply my own punishment to any who break their word?"

"Yes chief. Goodnight."

The next day was spent in rehousing the mine slaves and having them examined by the medicos. It would be ten or fifteen days before most of them would be fit enough to carry out any ordinary work - not that there was much for them to do. No industry except gold smelting remained, nor were there any cattle or sheep to herd. That would change quickly of course, and Camelod was already arranging for shipments of animals down the river. It seemed that Venutius and his horde had eaten every last cow or sheep between Riverdown and the Cothi. Jossoc hoped that some of the inhabitants would go back to the mines for pay.

By the third day after taking the fortress, the town was growing. There were no boards with which to build the standard huts and so, as a temporary measure, round mud and wattle huts with heather thatched roofs were sited on rectangular foundations made of pounded stone from the mine spoil tips. A start was made on teaching the Brigante the art of road building, some of the more intelligent were taught the use of the groma, staffs and measuring line to direct the roadbuilders. Jossoc had a work force of more than one thousand and very shortly there was a short stretch of road leading from the southern gate of the fortress. The problems that he had anticipated regarding the pride of the nobles and warriors, did not materialise - he suspected that Rhodri had a lot to do with that. The first stretch of road had to be redug and relaid several times as it was used to instruct the Brigante, but the result each time was a good, servicable surface twelve feet wide and based on a sound foundation.

On the fifth day the surveyors arrived and the sixth day was spent organising gangs of men to build sections on the route that had been decided upon, the order of the building was a leapfrogging that brought the rearmost gang forward to the beginning of the line as soon as they reached the stretch being built in front. Not that the Camelodian legion built a

fully hardened surface with foundations to begin with. The first task was to build a track between the two terminals. In this case that track was sixty miles long and wide enough for one wagon - passing places occurred every quarter of a mile. A track of this type enabled the legion to establish a means of fast communication between Riverdown and Cothi - and it speeded the transportation of road building materials.

On the seventh day, the Brigante who were opting for citizenship and regular service in the pioneers, attended a mass oath giving, and the start of their six months probationary period was duly registered by the legion's clerks.

Day eight saw the road building gangs move out. For the first stage - the clearing and building of the pathfinder track - the gangs were relatively small, just twenty five strong and the length of road each was responsible for, was half a mile. Simple arithmetic demonstrated that the line of individual gangs would have stretched for twenty miles, adding almost a day's march to a gang's task of building their half mile. It took an average of three hours to clear and make half a mile of track. As a consequence one batch of twenty gangs were marched thirty miles on their first day and started the building of the track next day. Now each gang built one mile a day and spent three hours marching from section to section. In three days the simple track reached Riverdown.

Jossoc took his bullion cart and an escort of half a century of cavalry through Riverdown's western gatehouse the next morning, he rode in dress uniform and his companion was Rhodri, dressed once again in his splendid cloak and gilded helmet. Caionac welcomed them and assigned them a large room in the principia, giving them time for a bath before Jossoc made his report, Rhodri was to come too.

The meeting was a surprise to Rhodri for Venutius was there. "Prince."

"Well surely you knew that the Camelodians had defeated my army, Rhodri." He smiled and raised his hands, open to the ceiling, "But nevertheless, I am here, unfettered, not imprisoned and treated as a guest by Commander Caionac."

"Legate now, Prince - my promotion came through yesterday, I shall command the legionary fortress at Severnside, when its' walls and offices have been improved. That will probably be a month from now."

Venutius cocked his head on one side and put his tongue in his cheek, "I named you Legate when we first met. If you remember? My congratulations."

Celtic Empire - Camelod

"Thank you, but the first time we met (although not face to face admittedly), I was the clown who sent men out to gather booty in the middle of the battlefield and never guessed that you might have chariots."

"You did? I recall that battle quite clearly - and with pain. I have wasted a great deal of time in plotting to raze Windubro since then. I would have done better to do what I did a few days ago and throw myself on your mercy."

"I was brash and over-confident then - it was probably not the right time to test my good sense or mercy."

He had been standing when Jossoc and Rhodri came in, but now he gestured to cushioned stools and waited for them to sit before sitting himself. "Prince Venutius, Rhodri and senior tribune Jossoc - the rank is substantive now Jossoc - will post to Windubro tomorrow.

"You'll take a fast boat to Severnside, spend the night there before riding the length of the Severn road, travel at night on another fast boat, and arriving at Windubro less than two hours later.

"You'll be able to sleep on the boat, although it's hardly worth it. You'll be in Windubro before midnight the day after tomorrow."

"Can you truly navigate the river at night?" It was Venutius's question, but one that Jossoc would have put too.

"Yes, Tutir at headquarters has modified orders for those signal posts that actually lie on the river, so that they light beacons if signalled earlier - and there is a system of tethered floats with reflectors on a two foot mast that picks up the glow of the lanterns in the bow of the boat."

"Cunning, legate."

"Not **my** cunning Venutius, but centurion Tutir, captain of headquarter's signals. The result will be that you will have a fast journey and be rested for your meeting with Lord Lucius."

Rhodri looked uncomfortable, "Is there some emergency, then?"

"Hm? ... Oh no, but the General is an impatient man when he has a new toy and I guess he wanted to test out how quickly he could get you from here to Windubro. You're lucky he didn't demand that you ride the Severn road at night, just to reduce the journey time."

The expression on Venutius's face showed very clearly that he was not used to deferring to other men's demands, but - he gave an almost imperceptible shrug - he was a defeated prince. To be fair to Venutius, the very generosity of his treatment made it difficult to continuously bear in mind that he was no longer a true prince. It was a courtesy title only.

"Have you any idea what the King and General Lucius want of me?" Venutius, having brought his true position back to mind, had now swung the other way and was wondering whether his execution was being arranged after all.

"Don't worry prince. The General has already given his word that you will come to no harm - he doesn't break his word. I would only be guessing if I gave an opinion," Caionac smiled, "and a guess is no use to you is it?"

"No Legate. You're quite correct. We shall know in a very short time." He looked across at the younger chieftain, Rhodri was also wondering about his future - he had no liking for the idea of joining the pioneer branch of the legion and, at the moment there seemed to be no alternative.

Caionac brought the short meeting to an end, "Your report is being forwarded by courier, Jossoc, doubtless Lord Lucius will have read it by the time you get to Windubro.

"That's all gentlemen, I would enjoy your company tonight for dinner, three or four of my other officers will be there. Amongst other things I believe they'll be interested in who was responsible for the design of the gatehouses at Cothi fortress, and for training your artillery men. I look forward to seeing you then."

The daylight journey up river to Severnside was very pleasant, the boat was rowed at top speed with two alternating crews of oarsmen, the weather was bright and warm and the three passengers enjoyed their leisure. Food and wine had been packed and for possibly the first time in his life Jossoc was journeying without the need to do anything himself. He talked with his companions, walked along the wide gangway between the rowers and chatted with the off-duty men sprawled along it, and then returned to his comfortably cushioned seat just in front of the steersman (who steered by calling orders to lefthand or righthand rowers), to watch the scenery unroll on either side. A succession of trees lined the banks, arranged almost as a pattern. Ranks of alder, followed by ranks of willow -

Celtic Empire - Camelod

reaching out ten or fifteen feet across the water - and they were followed by their cousins the withies, cut and cropped into knobby clubs that sprouted the raw material for hurdles and baskets and even fire pots. And through this variegated veil the land itself changed rapidly from flat meadow to rumpled woodland and then to the raw red stone that the untiring saw of the river had cut deeply, whenever the land rolled into modest heights.

It had been four years since Severnside and Riverdown had been settled and then developed into towns. The withies bore evidence to the age of previous settlements here, they were knobbed with the scars of countless harvests, but in the last few years the riverside population had multiplied rapidly with the recent introduction of signal posts, courier stations and Camelodian settlements. Those civilised incursions into the meagre riparian society had also attracted other settlers - not yet seeking citizenship, but gaining from the traffic and the security. Not a mile went by, but on one bank or the other, there would be seen a cluster of houses or huts, sometimes with an equally great cluster of workshops and storehouses, and at other times simply long, open fields where grazing cattle, penned pigs or rambling sheep were the only visible population. The small, fortified posts and courier stations stood alone in this landscape. Although they were the instigators of the growth along both banks, they remained aloof. Stark wooden walls clad with turf to a height of fifteen feet, made even these tiny fortifications too difficult for the occasional band of 'men o' the woods' to tackle. In the time that it would have taken to make any impression on them, the beacons would have been lighted and Camelodian cavalry on their way. Jossoc was not sure whether they were a welcome sight or not as he floated upstream, on the one hand they were a symbol of Camelod's extended protection - on the other, they were scars on the sylvan river bank.

The unrolling scene was soporific Jossoc slept briefly and then half woke, drowsily considering the situation he found himself in - escort and custodian to two nobles ... the one a virtual king. What did they think of their situation he wondered? They were talking quietly with no obvious signs of discontent with their lot. Could a man really adjust so easily to a great fall? Maybe what he saw was merely a facade they erected against men who, a few days ago, had been enemies?

Mentally he shrugged and drowsed off again. A sudden flurry amongst the oars as they dodged a tree trunk slowly drifting in the other direction, awoke him. There was no danger, no excitement among the men and as he turned to watch the obstruction disappear around a river bend they had just negotiated, his thoughts turned to his own future. A tribune now! His pay would increase by almost a half, his house would be amongst those on the slopes overlooking the fortress and twice the size of his present one. Rooms to entertain very respectably, bedrooms to offer guests, every opportunity to cultivate

merchants and traders who could increase his growing wealth. He'd probably have Caionac's old house now that the senior tribune had been made one of the first legates in Camelod. Perhaps he ought to marry? Jossoc fell asleep again.

There were two hours to dark when the boat delivered them to the quayside. Time to find out what quarters had been assigned them for the overnight stay, visit the legionary bath house and share the news of his promotion with friends. He looked forward to introducing them to Venutius, prince and virtual king of the Brigante (what else would you call the husband of a queen?). For some reason the lazy day had given him an appetite, which led him to speculate on the evening meal. Surely the rank of his prisoners would call for dinner with the fortress commander? It did and when he found his temporary bed that night he was more than happy with the hospitality that had been extended. In view of the journey next day, he watered his wine well and was fairly circumspect in the amount he drank. Nevertheless, the horn that woke him in the morning was barely able to rouse him. Sleepily he bathed in a basin, decided that he did not need to visit the principia barber - indeed there was no time for such a lengthy process - dressed, ate the hot bread rolls that had been brought to him at reveille, drank the milk he had requested the night before, and finally felt fit to find his travelling companions.

Venutius and Rhodri did not look as wide awake as he did. He knew they had been less careful of the flagon than he had. Half an hour later they began their thirty five mile ride to Severn station; six hours of riding, including three stops to change horses, eat and relieve themselves. Conversation was limited to grunts and an occasional outburst of cursing from Venutius who had never been fond of horses anyway. When the warehouses and docks of the station came into view, the afternoon was almost gone. They decided (Jossoc left it to his two noble companions to make the decision, he had no intention of openly flouting his general's direct orders), to rest for two hours.

Night-time travel down river - at what seemed to be twice the speed of the daytime one - was, quite frankly, terrifying. Jossoc shut his eyes after a few minutes and tried to sleep. Much to his surprise, when they reached the quayside at Windubro, he actually managed it. All in all he decided, he preferred river transport to horse - it was both more comfortable and faster. There was no time wasted at the quayside so far as Jossoc was concerned.

"You're to report immediately to the General's private office tribune," The centurion on duty in the Customs office informed him.

"Immediately?"

"Yes, tribune. He's waiting for you."

Jossoc's heart sank, he regretted letting the two nobles have their way at Severn station. Did those lost two hours represent the time that General Lucius had been waiting? Three days into his tribuneship and likely to get a dressing down the first time he reported.

"What about prince Venutius and noble Rhodri?"

"I am to take them to their quarters, the General will see them tomorrow."

"Oh."

He straightened his back, thanked the centurion and strode off along the road to the fortress and the via Principalis. Headquarters was lit with a row of torches on poles ranked along the limestone frontage, two guards flanked the great double doors and, as he approached he came to the conclusion from the number of glowing windows that every office in headquarters was working full pelt.

A grizzled primus centurion stood at the entrance to his office, from his age he must be an import from the continent, very few of the Camelodian centurions were older than their late twenties. The Camelodian pattern of principia was quite different to the Roman, it had no internal parade ground, neither Lucius nor Gregory considered that the buildings should be anything, but administrative offices, legionary shrines and strongrooms. Some sleeping quarters were provided for the general and senior officers who might be required to stay overnight and there were kitchens and a small bath house, but other than that it was a very businesslike layout. The primus noted Jossoc's name and rank, had him sign in on the current folio page and directed him to Lucius's private office. A long cross corridor stretched the length of the building, with store rooms and archives on the side closest to the road and fifteen offices opposite. The general's was at the centre of the corridor facing the entrance to the principia, two guards flanked that impressive doorway too - as Jossoc approached they came to attention, rapped on the doors and opened them to announce his presence.

"Come in lad. Come in." The distant voice sounded friendly, and the new tribune felt more comfortable quite suddenly. He cradled his helmet on his left arm and marched in, the doors closing so swiftly behind him that for a moment he thought they would hit him. Lucius sat behind a huge desk - which supported both feet. He had a bowl of fried pork, chicken and salad on his lap.

Lucius wiped his mouth with a linen cloth and waved to a cushioned chair at the side of the desk, "Are you hungry lad?"

"Well"

"Let's deal with that first then." One hand reached out and struck a small desk gong - a servant appeared almost instantly. "Another of these for the tribune, Otto," he indicated the bowl on his lap, "And a flagon of the Spanish wine and two cups."

"You'll be drinking too, General?"

"I shall. So now you know which flagon to open, eh?"

A slight smile acknowledged the hint, "Yes General."

Lucius returned his attention to Jossoc as soon as the servant had left, "Kearhal will be at Severnside for another two or three days yet so I am going to have to repeat this little speech for him later." He sorted through the titbits on his plate and then, deciding that he had finished everything he had a fancy for, continued, "We now have seven tribunes, substantive rank ...you and Kearhal - Aiden, Kirwen, Huw, Dunal and Cavan. Caionac and Dungan are both legates. Right now we have a total strength of about fifteen thousand men, but we can only assume two full legions out of that because of the way that we have spread ourselves around the settlements, signal posts and courier stations. So we have a full complement of legates, but nowhere near the number of tribunes that we will need." Lucius raised a quizzical eyebrow "Why do we need more? Well it is because the tribune's job is no longer purely military.

"It is nearly four years since the High Council mapped out a series of measures to allow Camelod to grow and remain properly organised. The part of that scheme that concerns the tribunes is the system of government that Secretary Daffyd constructed and agreed with King Gregory and myself - it takes a lot from the Roman system ...particularly the titles, but is much simplified. Since a history of Rome and her organisation will be one of the subjects that you will all be studying shortly....." Lucius paused to judge the effect this comment had on Jossoc, "Yes you're all going to school, my boy. No more military adventures for a while.

"As I was saying, since you'll be studying Roman history there's no point in my detailing the differences now. The end result is that from this point on the responsibility for running the legion day by day lies with the centurions and primuses. No great change there,

because that is how we were running up to the point that you and your fellows were made temporary tribunes. Now that the rank is substantive however, you seven tribunes will shed full time responsibility within the legion and take on civil posts. You will be appointed as *propraetors* - that is, assistants to the praetors and prefects. Not all tribunes will follow this path in future, but right now we don't have enough to divide between the legates' staff and the praetors'. Since we don't have any *propraetors* at the moment, you will need to learn the job by studying law and civics at the College in *Clarbrae* - and by practicing it in *Windubro*, *Cantodunon*, *Severnside* and *Riverdown*."

Jossoc's face displayed complete bewilderment and no little apprehension, which clearly amused his general, "You didn't think that you were going to get a larger house and increased salary for doing the same job with a different title did you, my boy?"

"Oh no, you're going to be working very hard for the next few years. We have not had a properly organised civil government before - and we are too big now to manage without. Praetors and *propraetors* bear responsibility for; civic maintenance (roads, buildings, docks etc.), administration of the law and the law courts, they act as censors (we cannot afford to make that a separate office), organise elections and election rolls, organise fire and policing services, organise the offices for controlling the various commercial aspects of our towns and so on. Anything that you can think of, that needs organising for the towns and settlements is the responsibility of a praetor or *propraetor*. At the moment there are only seven of you, but the population is still relatively small and as it grows, we will appoint new tribunes and *propraetors* - and the departments will be divided into manageable size and function.

"There! Now .. I wonder if you have any questions?"

Jossoc was left almost speechless by this high speed explanation of the new duties that were being thrust upon him, but he did manage a reasonable response, "I have a great number of questions general - I think, ...but I don't understand enough of what you've just said to formulate them in any sensible fashion."

"Don't worry Jossoc, I would have been amazed and suspicious if you had claimed to completely understand what I was talking about. The main thing that I and the king need you to be aware of is that 'tribune' is more than a military ranking, it is the first of the magisterial posts. All *propraetors* will be appointed from tribunes, praetors will be elected from the *propraetors* by the council in three years time - if you care to make a guess at what our population will be then, how many praetors we will need and how many men there will be to choose from - you're welcome. Our growth in the last three years has been

surprising enough to discourage me from making guesses of that nature, but I'm pretty certain that when you become a senior tribune, you will also be elected a praetor - with propraetors of your own to share the load.

"That is as much as I wanted to say on that subject. You have much to learn and your time will be spent fairly evenly between Clarbrae and practicing what you learn here in Windubro - probably for the next two years. However, I'm giving you and Kearhal a week to settle into your new homes before you are packed off to Clarbrae. Your pay will rise to two thousand sesterces a year, you now have thirty community shares instead of the twenty you had as a primus - and a new house. Have you any thoughts on that?"

"The house, general. Presumably legate Caionac will be moving too, can I have his old quarters?"

"I should think so, he will be back tomorrow so the moves can take place then. Any particular reason?"

"The view, general. It has a beautiful view over the town and up the valley."

"Ah yes, the view. Tell me Jossoc," Lucius looked briefly at the papers in front of him, "You're not married yet are you?"

"No, general."

Lucius shrugged his shoulders, "Just a matter of interest. It's usually the wife that is interested in the view."

"Oh I shall be getting married, general. Eventually." Jossoc was suddenly worried that his general was reading more into his interest in the outlook from the new house, than he intended.

"Glad to hear it my boy. You'll become involved in the social life of the town now, as well as the legion - you need a wife." He leant forward over the desk, "And until then, my lad - be discreet."

Jossoc nearly choked, general Lucius's sexual indiscretions were famous amongst the Windubron garrison, probably amongst the other garrisons too.

"Yes General."

"Well that's all, I wanted to say. See the principia clerks in the morning and they will sort out all the arrangements for your temporary transfer to Clarbrae. Goodnight, Jossoc."

Jossoc returned his goodnight and rose to his feet to salute and leave the room. He was still somewhat dazed by the turn his career had taken, pleasantly so, buthe was expected to marry! It was something that he had expected to happen someday, like losing his hair, or his teeth, but not just yet. Marriage was something he associated with older men, although, if he thought about it at all, the logic of that conclusion was deeply faulted by the number of his own friends who were already married - some of them younger than him! How did you go about it?

He'd known a number of young women of course, slept with several of them too and never had the slightest inclination to make any of those relationships permanent. Neither, so far as he could remember had any of the young women. As he thought about it a bit deeper he suddenly realised that quite a few of those women were now married to his friends! Was there something wrong with him? Had he got a message tattooed on his forehead or something? The ludicrous thought cleared his brain. There was nothing wrong with him, the girls had simply recognised that he was not interested in marriage. He supposed that he must have made that plain enough by his behaviour.

He would have a word with Kierhal when he returned from Severnside.

Things had moved very quickly these last few months, but then, mused Lucius, they had a habit of doing that in Camelod. He had just created two legates, both young men in their late twenties. Legate was the commander of a full legion, he commanded a force of five thousand legionary and up to half that many men as cavalry, ballista men, light cavalry and engineers - and in Rome the legate would be of prominent aristocratic family and have two or three decades of political and military history behind him. There had been minor aristocrats like Julius Caesar of course, but they were exceptional. Lucius had no worries about Dungan, he was old beyond his years, a good innovative soldier with a stern manner that intimidated when he wanted it to. Caionac was a different type altogether, the general had no doubt about his ability on the field, but he was a little nervous about his ability to organise a legion, to take brutal administrative decisions when needed - and do it without any hint of vacillation. Killing an enemy was one thing, cutting short a colleague's ambitions because he did not meet a necessary standard was entirely different.

They needed two legates though, and after Dungan, Caionac was the best choice. On the whole Lucius believed that the young man would learn just as rapidly as he had after his near debacle in 39 - and if not ... well Lucius would have to show his own willingness to practice 'administrative brutality'. There was another matter that exercised him more than this however. The recent battles had been fought by the cavalry and the fire weapons of the mobile ballistas, Camelod's infantry had played the part of an audience for the most part and despite the fact that all sections of the legion would share the spoils of battle equally, he could expect that disappointment ...disatisfaction would lower morale in that important arm of Camelod's forces. The state could not rely on cavalry and mobiles alone - certainly not when the impending Roman invasion took place and Camelod faced a trained and hardened army. He must give some thought to organising expeditions into the wilder lands of the north; pacification was a sound employment for the infantry - and it could yield commercial advantages too. Lucius mused for a while, staring at the map on his office wall it was a smaller version of those in the war room. After an hour he had filled half a dozen wax tablets with notes and the germ of a wide ranging campaign had been set down for future attention.

He left it until the third hour before calling the two Brigante to his office, giving them an affable greeting, but leaving no doubt that their future was under discussion at the moment and they would have very little choice in the direction it would take. "This will not be a long interview, in fact it is more a matter of acquainting you with the facts of your present situation.

"Make no mistake, Venutius. Although we are treating you in a civilised fashion now, we remember that you have been an active enemy of ours for four years. You've caused a great deal of trouble, cost us a large sum of money in materiel and lost production andyou have been slave raiding our neighbours to dig your mines for a couple of years. In that time you," His finger punched forward at the seated figure of the prince, "...you have been responsible for a large number of deaths of a kind that I would hesitate to subject a violent criminal to."

There was no response from the prince, nor from Rhodri who quite clearly was adopting an inferior posture - so far as responsibility for the attacks on Camelod and Cothi were concerned. Lucius continued, "My own inclination was to have you executed. Despite what I believe my tribune told you, I am a simple man. An enemy should be eliminated - however that is not the view that King Gregory takesor not just yet. It is his view that while he and his lady complete their tour of the new lands to the north and east of the Ouze, you should be given freedom (under your oath not to escape), to view Windubro, the Trent settlements and Cantodunon. He believes that you might be of value to Camelod

and that this opportunity will convince you that your only chance of a future, will be to swear loyalty to Camelod and keep both the letter and the intent of the oath.

"I do have my doubts, but then, as I said, I am a simple soldier. My enemies usually die violently." Leaning back he pinched his lower lip between thumb and finger as he studied the two Brigante nobles. "The king will return to Cantodunon in two weeks, at which time all four of us will meet and bring matters to a definite conclusion - one way or the other. Will you both give your oath that you will not attempt to escape or evade the meeting?"

"I have no difficulty there. You have my oath general." He gave a bleak smile, "I see no alternative." Drawing a deep breath Venutius acknowledged, "You have indeed been generous and I thank you."

Rhodri gave his own oath, he was relieved to see that Lucius's contained antagonism had been aimed solely at the prince. Apparently Lucius did not consider Venutius's subordinates, bore any great responsibility for the acts of the Brigante. He followed the chastened prince out of the office with the distinct impression that he had a future - and possibly a comfortable one.

Chapter twenty

Cantodunon May 43 AD

Saith and Rowena had been married for several weeks now, the wedding took place soon after Saith became a cadet. This was a new rank, level with optio and carrying the same salary of seven hundred and twenty sesterces per annum. From this point on the establishment of each cohort of ten centuries would contain seven optios and three cadets. The rank had been created with two objects in mind; firstly it provided the first stepping stone in the officer ranks and secondly, it made sure that new officers would have seen service in the field and taken the same responsibilities as an optio - and later, before becoming junior tribunes, be sufficiently experienced in the practicalities of warfare to be ready for a centurion's duties. Cadets, therefore, were probably the most hard worked of all ranks; they had their duties as optios and also took posts in the century administrative offices. Since their duties as optios took first importance, cadets spent a great deal of their evenings and sometime nights, trying to catch up with their administrative responsibilities. It was exhausting, but after a month or two, most found legitimate ways of shedding some of the work whilst maintaining the responsibility - which, in itself, was a major step in the young officer's education.

Saith's solution had been to take a lot of the paperwork home with him, where he and Rowena shared it between them! Her literacy and numeracy was of longer standing than his - Saith had not been able to read before joining the legion; Rowena, on the other hand, as the daughter of a noble, had been taught to read and write in Latin as a girl and only had to transfer the art to the new, written Celtic that Camelod used. She had suggested the solution herself, having grown very dissatisfied with a new husband who was fit for nothing when he got back from the principia except to eat and then fall into bed - to sleep.

All ranks had living quarters within the fortress at Cantodunon, but since that was large enough for a population at least twice its present one, that was no hardship. Cadets' housing was the same as an optio's - thirty feet by forty with six rooms - it was a very generous size. In Saith's experience it was huge, even Rowena found it larger and more convenient than her father's old house. The study, where they sat now, was also the place that stored wool for spinning. There was a continual shortage of yarn; weaving had been speeded up by the invention of the flying shuttle - propelled across the warp threads by jerking a strap - but no one had found a way of increasing the supply of yarn. The quality of yarn varied considerably and there was a certain amount of rivalry which Rowena tried to ignore - her own yarn was nothing to boast about, servicable, but for some reason her fingers lacked the skill to control the twist and pull of the wool, any better than was needed to produced a strong, slightly lumpy thread.

She pushed a pile of tablets across the table to Saith and put a weight on the end of the scroll she had been working on, while the ink dried, "That's the end of last month's requisitions, for the second century - and, as far as I'm concerned, my last pen stroke today."

"We're getting quicker." Saith said, his own task was simply checking entries from century records against the monthly quartermaster tally. The job had been finished for a quarter of an hour past, "It's just getting dark. Are you tired?"

He received a quizzical glance from his wife and added, "It's ceilidh night."

"Ah, I thought .."

"We can do that later," Saith grinned appreciatively, "but we could easily afford a meal at one of the stalls up in the town"

"Mmmm. Or we could collect something hot to bring back here - and buy a flagon of a good wine, too - I don't feel like a noisy evening."

He leant across the table and laid his forefinger on the tip of her nose, "Now that is very deceitful, my love. The last time we had a 'quiet night in' you were very noisy indeed. If we'd had one of the small legionary houses the neighbours would've been round to see what the problem was."

Very slowly she took hold of his finger and bent it backwards, forcing him down onto the table - and then she whispered in his ear, "Is this quiet enough, dear?"

"Bitch! OW!"

"You mind your manners, husband mine. I know other tricks you see - and a man's voice is **so** much louder than a woman's." A gentle nip at his ear was followed by the announcement. "I don't feel hungry now, dear. What I would really like is ..." And her other hand skillfully brought a whoop of laughter from his lips as he twisted about on the table, helplessly imprisoned by one finger. One final squeeze and she released his finger, dodged around the table while he was struggling to get up, and ran, laughing, into the bedroom calling out as she went, "Will you be long?"

His voice was reproachful as he stood up, rubbing himself, "That hurt, Rowena."

In the few seconds that she had been out of his sight, Rowena had flung off her tunic and dress and now stood at the doorway, demurely nude, "Ah. That's a shame." And then, cocking her head to one side, pointedly stared down at him and said, "But there doesn't seem to be any permanent damage does there? Shall we see if he still works?"

Saith was suddenly moving very quickly and Rowena's squeal of apprehension was supplanted by a peal of hysterical feminine laughter. Another noisy night followed - but there were no neighbourly complaints, cadet housing was solidly built.

New Derwenta

May 43 AD

Gregory had spent two days in the cooperage of the new town. The Celtic wooden barrel was not well known in the Mediterranean world. Some small barrels or dolium were used by Rome, but for some reason pottery jars and amphora were preferred for the transport of both wet and dry goods. In Gaul the wine-tight wooden barrel had been made and used for several centuries, wherever oak was available. In two days - and while Myrcal was pursuing business of her own with a succession of merchants and shippers - Gregory had learnt a great deal about the trade of coopering or making barrels. Most of what he learnt only served to amplify what he already surmised - that it was a difficult trade and barrels that could hold liquid were expensive, but then, against that disadvantage there were a great many advantages. A barrel weighing three hundred pounds could be rolled by one man and, because it was not simply a cylinder, but curved from end to end, it could be manoeuvred by one man too. You could not do that with a sack of grain of half that weight. It was fairly rat-proof, sacks definitely were not. Barrels were incredibly strong; he had seen one filled with water and deliberately dropped a matter of six feet and it had simply bounced. A pottery jar or amphora would shatter if dropped less than half that distance.

The cooper at New Derwenta knew of two types of barrel, the easiest one to make was for dry storage and capable of being waxed on the outside to keep damp out, but it was not capable of storing liquids; the second type was, of course, a wet barrel that could hold wine - or any other liquid - without leakage. After two days of talking about the types of wood needed, methods of splitting and then drying (not the other way around as he had thought), planing, heating, bending and hooping with iron bands, Gregory had a clear picture of the difficulties. He was also determined to expand the industry and having coopers trained or brought from Gaul for each of the towns in Camelod. It was not simply a matter of transporting grain or mead or arboroleum - every bucket in Camelod was either leather or pottery, containers for seed corn, peas, beans and any number of common items were made from wicker, or clay or leather. Surely large vats of water for fire fighting

Celtic Empire - Camelod

could be made using the same process, placed on tall platforms and then the natural flow directed through leather pipes.

New Derwenta was the last large town on their progress, tomorrow he and Myrcal would take the new southern track that followed the course of the Derwent and then struck south to Beturos. Altogether it had been a highly successful exercise, they had been entertained enthusiastically at every settlement on the circuitous route. Both of them had an accurate picture of the commerce and growing industries of the area and their very presence had encouraged the setting up of new settlements of wouldbe citizens. It was a land with an abundance of waterways and useful streams providing power for waterwheels from the highlands that bordered it. Almost one hundred and fifty miles long - their route encompassed well over fifteen hundred square miles of woodland and meadows. At the moment the population was still fairly sparse and scattered as a result of the proximity of the Brigante hillmen, but Camelod's fortresses, fortlets and signal posts had already formed a nucleus for settlement growth in addition to the new towns of Afondun, Ebora, Isur, Pencalda, New Derwenta and Brido. Those fortress towns now formed a border along the western flank and across to the east coast. Gregory had no doubt that they could be protected easily from future depredations of Brigante and confidently expected a healthy crop of cattle, horses, sheep and grain in a couple of years.

"I want the first two hundred barrels that your coopers produce, Gregory." Myrcal had already made up her own mind on the value of the barrels. With little rolls of clay she had fashioned models and shown them stacked in the holds of ships made from wicker. They were at least as stable as amphora, and in rough weather amphora lost their stability as soon as the first ones broke and no longer supported their neighbours. Barrels protected their contents from seawater too.

"Can you bring in coopers, dear?" It was a question for which Gregory had no immediate answer. He knew that there were plenty of coopers in Gaul, but they grouped in areas where the working materials were available and cheap and he did not know where those were. That was another favour he must ask of Drusus. Wryly he admitted the lack of information - and his expectation of a solution. Then he broached another subject.

"Have you finished with your merchants Myrcal? I'd like to start back tomorrow. The word from Lucius is that he expects me in ten days time and, like it or not, he has indicated to Venutius that we might let him off the hook."

"No reason at all, there are half a dozen men who are concerned with the river boats. They want to see the new road from Beturos and they want to buy licenses for the docks at Cantodunon. They can travel with us and negotiate deals on the way."

"Negotiate? Myrcal I know that you kept them up until early morning and I suspect that you will do the same tonight. Were those 'negotiations'?"

She gave him an innocent smile, "Oh certainly not my dear, they are not ready to talk about contracts and licenses and such, I simply gave them a brief history of Camelod, our agriculture, exports, industries - really such a lot to tell them. They looked a little tired towards morning and they might have missed some important information - I can put that right tonight and then, we'll make a nice early start in the morning."

"You in our sprung cart and they in the normal ones - and it's still a fairly rough track along the side of the Derwent."

Myrcal's smile was broad, "And we can start our negotiations tomorrow when we stop for the night. I think that they will be in a proper condition by then."

"I should think you're right dear. You know, I saw those traders and boat men when they arrived - their faces lit up when they learnt that they would be making contracts with a woman, but this morning there was a distinct change when you thoughtfully had them woken early, so that they could walk around New Derwenta with you. They were tired, bad tempered - and I believe two of them had come to blows, I can't think of another explanation for their bruised faces."

"Do you think they are ripe yet Gregory?"

"Over-ripe, I think."

Myrcal became more serious, "Gregory, these men are new to the river trade. I think that they will be hiring boats since they don't have established businesses - and they are here because news of our pacification of the land, the new towns and settlements has awakened a lot of interest at Beturos. They believe, as you do, that the population was scattered and poverty stricken simply because of the frequent raids; the settlements and fortresses have put an end to that and the Parisi are convinced that there will be grain and wool to ship to Gaul by the autumn ... And next year with our manufacturies working well, the trade could be enormous."

"Yes Myrcal, I realise all that."

"Wait, Gregory, I know that you realise it - you planned it after all, but what are you doing about security. It has been years now since Drusus suggested that we needed informants, so that we were not taken by surprise again as we were on the Severn when Venutius struck. What have you done about it? If this land becomes as rich as I think it will, there'll be a lot of greedy eyes upon it - from the west and, more dangerously, from Gaul. Our military strength is only sufficient to deal with Brigante raids, there's a long coastline and for the next few years, at least, we're very vulnerable there. We need to know what our enemies are planning, so that we have time to concentrate where they intend to attack."

Gregory regarded her quietly for some seconds, "You still surprise me from time to time you know. I was sure that commerce and your ships were engaging all your attention."

"You're quite right of course." One hand scratched at his high forehead (which was how he described his baldness), "Drusus has an effective network on the continent which is proving useful and Lucius has finished his apprenticeship with the fellow we brought over."

"I didn't know we'd brought anybody to instruct Lucius in counter-espionage."

"Nobody knows, dear. He was just another clerk working in Lucius's private office."

"The problem is that it takes time, Lucius has built up a network of twenty of so as he went about his constant task of mapping, but we concentrated on a rough circle around Windubro to begin withand it did not reach anywhere near to Venutius at Cothi. In fact we had no idea where he was until just before the invasion. This land must be protected too - and before we appoint a governor."

"A governor?"

"Yes, indeed. It will be a political post, with no authority over the army and only a limited number of men to enforce the collection of taxes, organisation of agriculture and industry, development of river traffic. We need a man who is used to authority, has a good brain and reason to be very careful."

Myrcal stared at him, "You're talking about Venutius, aren't you?" Her eyebrows went up and down as she considered this, "Yes you are. Would you really give him such a reward for all the trouble he's caused us"

"The answer, love, is 'Yes and maybe.' I'm certainly considering it. The man had succeeded in

instilling some discipline in his Brigante warriors - which neither Lucius nor I thought possible. He had obtained ballista and trained men to use them sensibly - and that small fortress at Cothi had an excellent defensive innovation. It might have been his idea or it might have been the commander of the fort, either way Venutius has skills that are probably useful to us. The army beat him around the head pretty thoroughly at Riverdown and now he had nothing to show for several years of what a Brigante considers to be work. I think we can use him."

"And Lucius has indicated that we might let him off the hook, as you put it earlier? I wondered what you meant by that, at the time. Isn't it risky?"

"Certainly, which is why we need an intelligence service here, as you pointed out. Now, it occurs to me that just as Lucius travels the land, map making - and, I fear, planting little facsimiles of himself - a merchant or trader can do the same."

"You want me to find such a man?"

"Or find someone qualified to construct a network of spies and become a trader. You said that there are new traders amongst this band of rivermen, they won't be the last."

"I wouldn't know a 'qualified' man if I saw him."

"You have a number of contacts amongst the merchants of Gesoriacum ..."

"Can I find a suitable man?" She shook her head in exasperation, "I really don't know Gregory, but I'll write a few letters which the captain of the 'Fortunate Voyager' can deliver by hand."

"And if that doesn't result in anything, choose a loyal Parisi from Beturos and we'll apprentice him to Lucius's espionage specialist -, but I would prefer to keep the two networks separate, if possible."

"Is that all?" Myrcal was not altogether content with the new role her husband had found for her ...but it would be amusing, she thought. Maybe 'amusing' was the wrong word? "Then I will roust out my river traders and make sure they're not resting. I have lots to show them."

Gregory bestowed a brief kiss on her forehead and then shepherded her to the door of the cooperage, "Off you go then and torment them into a receptive frame of mind for your round of negotiations tomorrow night. And I'll get you your barrels when we have a cooperage set up in Cantodunon, there are plenty of medium sized oaks up on the ridge there - I'm told that those make prime timber for barrels."

He watched her striding back to the temporary merchants' houses that they had had built for visiting traders, new Derwenta was fifteen or twenty miles away from a decent supply of limestone for foundations and concrete, for the time being these houses, though roomy and comfortable, made do with timber walls and pounded stone and gravel floors. The techniques of coopering were clear enough in his mind now - not the detail of course, but considerations that needed to be borne in mind when bringing a cooper into the country. The requirements of the site, the tools, source of medium sized oak and, the storage facilities for split staves. Indeed, he realised with a start, he had allowed himself to become so immured in the subject that another, very important matter had slipped his memory. He needed to know how Venutius regarded the sanctity of oaths and what oath would carry most weight with him - if any did. This was something that neither he nor Lucius would be able to discover reliably, but Brioc might. Or one of his bardoi or druids.

Over the years Gregory had become deeply impressed with the ability that Medoc and Brioc - and one or two other druids - showed in getting inside a man's mind. Quite how it was done, he did not know, probably a matter of reading those small involuntary gestures and posturings that humans seem incapable of avoiding. At one time he would simply have called it instinct, but the years had taught him that what might be an unreliable 'instinct' so far as he was concerned, was a highly developed art amongst the druids. It was not simply a matter of them knowing when lies were being told, the skill was used for curative purposes too. Somehow certain druids could find a cause for a man or woman suddenly showing violent tendencies after a lifetime of unexceptionable behaviour and suggest a means of curing it; or at the other end of human emotions, cut away the black cloud that sometimes afflicted a person so that he or she, found themselves unable to speak to others, or keep company. Gregory had witnessed some remarkable instances of anti-social behaviour cured or repaired (he was not sure which word really applied), by a druid simply talking to the afflicted man or woman - or by 'laying on hands'.

If anyone could tell what lay within Venutius's heart now, it would be Brioc or one of his 'apprentices'. Half an hour later he had called into the legionary signals office in the principia and dictated a message to be sent by fast boat and courier to Clarbre. Brioc was to make the acquaintance of the Brigante prince and have a report ready for Gregory and Lucius on the day that the former arrived back in Cantodunon. He would receive the

message tomorrow noon and should be transported by fast boat down the Trent to his town residence. for that evening. Brioc was a subtle man, quite capable of learning what he needed to know without his victim realising that he was being quizzed - and Gregory would be well prepared when he interviewed Venutius.

Windubro.

Neither Venutius nor Rhodri were prepared for what they discovered in Windubro during the few days that they were allowed to explore. Venutius had seen Rome and some of the major cities of Gaul and they were much more magnificent than Windubro. Much larger, more stone buildings and populations that were many times greater. However, Windubro had no slums either and every Roman town that Venutius had seen as a youth certainly had those. In Rome itself the distinctive rumble of a collapsing multi-storey apartment block, seemed to occur every day as landlords added just one too many storeys to their property. There was no need for more than two storeys anywhere in Windubro.

It was the waterwheels that were most impressive and the multifarious tasks they had been harnessed to. Grain was milled at a prodigious rate in a group of mills run by just one wheel, great bags of grain and then flour were hoisted on cranes that stole energy from the same wheel, then swung and lowered safely into barges or wagons. The furnaces and forges blown by waterwheel and the single steam operated blower that had been installed here, was both fascinating and somewhat terrifying. The quantity of products leaving the various workshops was impressive, particularly when it was realised that Windubro had a smaller production of metal goods than Severnside and two or three of the Trent settlements. The evidence for that was clear to see in the boats that came down the Trent, over the waterslide that by-passed the bridge and dam, and into the docks.

After two days they had exhausted their ability to absorb information and turned to military matters. Venutius had been philosophical about the limited amount of discipline that he had managed to instill in the Brigante. He knew that they barely approximated to a civilised army, but what he saw on the parade ground inside the fortress and out on the practice meadows outside, made him appreciate just how outclassed his infantry had been. Leaving aside the matter of the new firebolts, the speed of discharge of the mobile ballistas and the accuracy with which they delivered concentrated bombardments, pouring the shots of all the machines into a small area and then dispersing to another part of the battle field, put them far ahead of anything that Rhodri's wall mounted artillery had been capable of. Three days of watching infantry, ballistas, heavy cavalry and the light ballista cavalry convinced both men that Camelod's army could not be resisted by any native assembly of warriors. Only ambush would serve to neutralise their organisation and weapons, and Venutius had already learned just how dangerous it was to plan large scale

ambushes - and how readily they had a negative effect on the instigators when things went wrong or the enemy behaved in an unexpected fashion. When an ambush worked well it was devastating, but it froze the assailants in position initially and generally limited their choice of subsequent manoeuvre much more than that of their opponents.

It was during his sojourn in Windubro that Venutius acknowledged that there was no chance of him ever being able to gain any advantage over the army and commerce of Camelod; Rhodri was affected quite differently, their experience aroused an unexpected and obviously unattainable desire to join the army. At the moment his total wealth encircled his forearm - a simple silver torc of about a fortieth of a talent. During his conversations with cavalry officers in the mess he had discovered that his silver represented just three month's salary for a tribune - and then there was the value of citizen shares and any booty the army won. It was sickening to realise just how many risks he had taken to acquire his small treasure.

When Brioc arrived at Windubro his first concern was to learn if anything more was known of the Camelodian casualties at Riverdown and Cothi. In fact casualties had been extremely light on the Camelodian side, less than fifty dead in total. There were, however, more than six thousand Brigante prisoners from Venutius's army. One thousand of those had accepted the same offer as Rhodri's men, half of the rest had been shipped down the Severn for eventual slavery in Gaul or Hispania. It was a simple matter of logistics, it was too far from Riverdown to Windubro to march five thousand men in shackles. One thousand only were making the journey to Windubro (with a force of three thousand to control them it was not felt necessary to use shackles), the rest were working in and around Severnside. There was much to do and the expedient of accepting men along the same lines as those established at Cothi and Riverdown, had the virtue of allowing the Camelodians to assess their reliability. As for the economics, the sale of five slaves in Gaul earned enough grain to feed two men for a year.

Venutius would have a retinue of one thousand Brigante at the most, Brioc mused. Something of a fall from being general of an army of eight or nine thousand.

Brioc arrived at his house overlooking the town early in the afternoon, which gave him plenty of time to extend invitations to Venutius and Rhodri to accept quarters in his guest wing and to have dinner with him that evening - Brioc was an affable host and he could afford to be a generous one. The party that joined the two Brigante included Bettis (the druid's leman), legates Caionac and Aiden and their wives. They dined on chairs arranged in a rough circle about a cluster of small tables that bore large dishes of prepared meats, vegetables and fruits. Caionac was quite well acquainted with the two Brigante of course

and, having a gregarious creature, was an asset in making the dinner a matter of easy and friendly conversation, when it could, so easily, have devolved into an informal interview with Venutius and Rhodri constantly aware of their status as prisoners, here in Windubro.

"Have you seen Duor's workshops, yet?" The legate was very proud of the products of the ironworks, its' forges, blowing engines, smelting furnaces and the cast iron furnaces. Although most of the cast iron manufacture had been concentrated on the Severn (where the iron ore most suitable for cast iron was found), Duor had kept two furnaces in Windubro for his new blowing cylinders - and for experimentation.

"Seen it and experienced it, my friend." Venutius drew back his sleeve to display a cluster of small burns. "Most impressive, I'll admit I ran for the door when they poured the furnace into the floor moulds. I've never seen anything like it, flames and huge streams of sparks everywhere." There was appreciative laughter from the rest of the group; they had all seen Duor's furnaces and usually the viewing had been arranged for the pouring of the molten metal. It was a frightening experience for anybody not immured to the process.

"There seemed to be a great deal of the fiery stuff being spilt into the channels in the floor and the moulds. How much would you guess, Caionac?"

The legate was proud of the fact that Windubro had such a marvel within its' control, but not very interested otherwise; he shrugged his shoulders, "Don't know really. I saw him take the flow from both furnaces when he was casting a cylinder for the blowing engine - that's a little taller than a man and you cannot get your arms all the way round one. There were all the bits he broke off or cut off to add to that as well. If you care to work it out you're welcome to. I'm not that keen on mathematics."

"Duor's wife says each furnace can melt a ton of iron." Tanwen was a pert little woman, who seemed to know every woman in Windubro and who made it her business to relay news and gossip to every one of them. As a legate's wife, she would make an incomparable conduit of information for Aiden - particularly because she was always scrupulously accurate in what she transmitted - almost to bardic standards. "And the ones he created for Severnside are even larger."

Information certainly, but not really of interest to Tanwen and she moved on rapidly, "But did you know that there is to be a proper forum built at the west end of the town?" She was addressing everybody for she was sure that the information she had from the Trade Secretary's chief scribe was not known by anyone else except Huw, the secretary himself and a few members of the High Council who had been involved in the planning.

"A real forum, built in stone. With a meeting place, and shops and merchants' warehouses and the Assembly house and shops."

"We've had the shops already, dear."

She pulled a face at her husband, "Well then, more shops."

"What's to happen to the market then?" The market took place every eight days in a fenced area alongside the wall of the fortress, upwards of two hundred little stalls displayed the produce of local small traders and men and women who had traveled twenty miles and more to sell meat, livestock, eggs, lengths of cloth, leather work, metalwork, jewellery, preserved fruits, mead, winter cider (with a large part of the water frozen out of it to leave a more heady brew), herbs, simple medicines - in fact anything that a man or woman could conceivably display on a board for sale in the open. The Windubron market had grown from a few dozen stalls ten years ago when the town was still housed within the fortress, to its present extent.

Aiden's question was treated with scorn by his wife, how could a man appreciate that there could never be too many shops and traders' stalls? "The market will do as ever it does." Her voice was dismissive and Brioc quietly decided to keep an eye on Aiden and his wife, there was contention growing there. "See," She turned to the two Brigantes, to explain, "We only have three market days every month and the people who sell their goods cannot afford the time for more. Now," Her hands lifted to demonstrate the wonder of the new arrangement, "we will have shops that are selling whatever we need all the time, just like Cantodunon's shopkeepers." Tanwen's hands lightly waved and then, with forefingers lifted in emphasis, "But we will have a proper forum for our shops and merchants, not merely scattered here and there along the main street. Don't you think that is much better?"

Neither Venutius nor Rhodri had any experience with shops, whether distributed within a town or concentrated in a forum, Rhodri in fact had never seen a town apart from those of Camelod. The prince had the memories of Rome and Gaul at least, to make a sage nod of the head and a murmur that might have been agreement. Bettis and Linnis, distracted Tanwen's attention from him by entering into a three-way discussion of the new facility and the forum that Bettis had seen a year ago when she travelled with Brioc across the sea to Gesoriacum.

Aiden, relieved that the women had limited their discussion asked Venutius, "Are you married prince?"

"The prince is married to queen Cartimandua," Brioc was quick to point out, he had no wish to have Venutius feel slighted by Aiden's lapse.

"I'm sorry sir. I knew that of course, it had simply slipped my memory."

"Not only **your** memory, young man. Cartimandua seems to have difficulty remembering it too." Venutius's tone was cool but cynical.

"Oh!"

His chastened expression brought a laugh from the prince, "I'm not too affronted by her lapses." Shrugging his shoulders he explained, "She was an enjoyable bed-fellow, it's true, but the marriage was a political device only - we believed that it would strengthen the federation if her tribes and mine saw us as man and wife. To be honest it did just that for a time, but then she decided that her bed needed more immediate warmth than that of a prince domiciled a hundred miles away amidst his own tribes."

"She took another man?"

Venutius's face made a sour grimace, "She took a boy! A young, pretty man. I was annoyed at first - in fact if I had them in my grasp, I expect I would have killed them both, but I wasn't ... I didn'tand the time for that is past now., but .." He leaned across the table with a hint of amusement on his lips, "...that is when I came rampaging out of the forest on your doorstep. Windubro was rich, I had heard and her army mere children. Forgive me Aiden and Caionac, but that **is** what was said at that time.

"A conquest such as Windubro would greatly increase my prestige within the federation and I might weld it all together under a crown - mine once I had dismissed Cartimandua. It didn't work out like that though, did it?"

"And what would you have done then?" Caionac wanted to know, "With Windubro in your pocket, did you intend to try for Cantodunon as well?"

Venutius exchanged glances with Rhodri, "I didn't think there was such a place. I had heard of it ...and Rhodri assured me that it was even larger than Windubro, but I knew you had only been in these lands five years at the most. Any sensible assessment showed that

Celtic Empire - Camelod

there had not been time for you to have expanded that quickly." He shook his head lugubriously, "It would have made no difference, simply taking Windubro and sacking it would have served my purpose."

"Well," said Brioc, "it's all an academic question now, you didn't succeed and we have you here in gentle confinement while tomorrow we begin to ship your men off to Gaul for sale."

"What!" The chair flew backwards as the angry man leapt to his feet, "You promised them their freedom the same as most of the others. Would you go back on that promise?"

"Oh there's no need to worry Venutius, whereas we did not actually promise them freedom, we did guarantee yours."

"You, you cretin! D'you think I'll take your gift when you treat my men with such contempt and dishonour? You and your legion can stuff yourselves before I'll take anything from you that my men won't get." The three women had pressed themselves back in their chairs, horrified and more than a little afraid at the prospect of violence breaking out in this civilised dining room.

Rhodri was on his feet too, although his anger was less raging than the prince's - and possibly more dangerous. Brioc seemed to be trying to make peace with Venutius, "Friend, there is no need for this uproar. You owe them nothing, they simply served you for what they could loot from the battlefield."

"No they didn't, you bastard druid! They gave me their oaths ..."

"What, all of them?"

"No man. The chieftains and they held the oaths of their men. That's how it is always done."

"But you gave them no oath-bound undertaking."

"Are you totally stupid?" Venutius still looked as though he might leap at Brioc at any moment and the two legates watched intently for the first hint.

"My oath to them was inherent in the act of taking their hands between mine. It did not need to be spoken."

"And you consider yourself bound by that implied oath?"

The prince was beginning to look puzzled now, this brief exchange really made no sense. If the Camelodians were intent upon selling the rest of his followers they had no need to stir him up in this fashion. "This was a test, wasn't it? Does Venutius consider his word is sacrosanct? Would I break an oath even though it was implied and not spoken aloud?"

He was still angry, his face flushed and sweating, but it was passing as he began to see Brioc's purpose. "Is it normal hospitality amongst you to test a man in such a way? I would be ashamed to behave so myself."

"Yes, yes. I admit it freely." He waved towards the chair, "Now sit man, you have my fullest apology - and I owe you an explanation. There was never any intention to break our word to your men, but it was necessary for me to judge whether your word once given could be broken. I think we have the answer to that and I must say that it pleases me greatly. You are an honest man Venutius and would probably have been an able ruler of the Brigante. For the moment you must be satisfied with that and my assurance that tomorrow King Gregory will put a matter to you that will fully explain the lengths I went to tonight. I cannot tell you more and I apologise again for the tantalising vagueness of my statement. It will all become clear tomorrow. For now though, let us return to our meal. I have an entertainment arranged that I believe will please you and compensate for my recent deceit. Meriadoc is here to sing and play. And he has brought the great harp of his family, not his small traveling one."

The seats were rearranged and Venutius and Rhodri, somewhat mollified by Brioc's words, made themselves comfortable as the famous bardoi entered and two attendants carried in the great harp and placed it where he sat waiting. The small audience was already quiet and Meriadoc's few seconds pause was more for effect than any necessity. With a few notes of introduction he broke into song. A love song. A sad remembrance of a love long thought lost and deeply felt, his voice was sweet, surprising in so elderly a man and it swooped from the joys of the first days of love, to those of regret when it was lost and then the years the lovers spent apart, climbing swiftly into ecstasy when fate brought the two together at the finish with all impairment of their joy removed by the Fates.

The last joyful notes rang out, not loudly, but with a clarity and purity that paid a final compliment to a love retrieved at last. Meriadoc smiled at his audience as they applauded him and then swung into a comic song with three characters, all of which he sang with clear differentiation, whilst the harp added what was obviously a donkey, a chicken and a

Celtic Empire - Camelod

wolf in appropriate places - it was masterly, particularly the spine chilling howl of the wolf as he stroked lightly up and down the vibrating string.

It was a most enjoyable evening and at its end, Venutius took a broach from his tunic and presented it to the bard. "In memory of a really remarkable evening. Meriadoc I knew of your fame before today, but it is the hearing that demonstrates your genius. My thanks and those of all here."

It was the end of the evening and all retired, Venutius and Rhodri to their apartments in Brioc's house.

The prince spent a restless night and took an early breakfast of bread rolls and honeyed milk, consequently he had to wait three hours before a messenger escorted him to the State House and his interview with Gregory. He was nervous and ashamed of his nervousness; a prince of the Brigante should not feel like this. Nevertheless, he had reviewed the last four years in the course of the night hours, and had come to the conclusion that the whole episode was not a simple succession of events, but a linked chain with one end created on the day that he wed Cartimandua and the other right here in Windubro. The next half hour or so would see the chain completed and a new one - maybe a very short one - created, with little relevance of what had gone before. In part it was a superstitious conclusion - in part a logical linking of the steps he had taken. The door to Gregory's private office on the second floor, opened and he looked across a polished wooden floor to the man sitting behind the simple desk. Gregory was tall, even seated that fact was obvious. His face was long and lean, dominated by a beak of a nose. Bright blue eyes beneath level brows stared intimidatingly at the prince, until with a blink he stroked one hand over his forehead and over the sparse strands of fair hair.

"Welcome prince. There is a chair there at the side of the desk, please take it. At the moment you are simply a guest and I am your host. I hope to change that in the next few minutes."

It was not a speech designed to put Venutius at ease, but it certainly bore no threat, "Thank you your majesty."

"Ah no." Gregory waved the honorific away, "I know that my people name me king, but I'm not. I lead. I command sometimes, but that is very far from being a king. Call me Lord and I will be happy."

"Yes, Lord Gregory."

A brief smile flitted across Gregory's face, "Thank you. Now, I believe I am going to surprise you. We wish to appoint you to be governor of the new lands between the Ure and the east coast. It is a four year appointment - and it is the first ever made in this country."

Venutius felt his mouth drop open. It was a strange feeling, he suddenly felt divorced from his body, the world it existed in did not feel real. Could he trust the evidence of his senses of touch, sight and hearing? Particularly hearing. Closing his mouth the prince sat up a little straighter and said, (although his throat was uncommonly dry), "Excuse me Lord, would you mind repeating that?"

"Certainly, prince Venutius. I wish you to accept a four year governorship of the land between the river Ure and the Gaulish sea."

Venutius took a deep breath. Gregory had said that he was going to surprise him - and there was no question about it - he certainly had. Even after taking the breath it was still some time before Venutius felt capable of responding in any sensible manner, but eventually he said, "I accept. What else could I say? It is a great honour, but more than that, you are putting a great deal of trust in me. Frankly I am bewildered, Lord."

"Certainly we are putting great trust in you, but we will require your oath - and Brioc assures me that you will keep your oath - and there are a number of matters, relating to how you administer your post that must be made clear to you. As governor you will be responsible for administering law, but will, in turn, be governed by it. I have no doubts in the matter, but my general was dubious to say the least."

"So would I be, Lord, in his place. We were at war a few days ago, although .." Breaking into a laugh, "It seems that legate Caionac was at war, I was merely participating as a victim. Those are terrible weapons that Camelod has developed. Terrible."

"I hope that we won't have to use them often." He rang a small hand bell that sat on the desk and, when a servant appeared ordered watered wine and bread rolls, with salted pork drippings.

As the girl went off, he resumed the conversation, "There is much that we need to discuss, but I want it to be quite clearly understood, that while we capture slaves during warfare and sell them, Camelod does not indulge in slave raiding and it does not employ slaves.

Anywhere. You'll note that although we sent some thousands of your army down the Severn to Gaul and Hispania, there are no slaves at all being sent into the mines. All the work done there now is paid for, the men have decent housing and other civilised facilities and they work no longer than ten hours in the day. We have developed a new rule of employment for mining, it states quite simply that work does not start until one hour after sunrise and it finishes one hour before sunset. Ah! The food and wine, set it between us please Fiona - that's right. Help yourself Venutius."

Gregory waited for the girl to leave the room and then returned briefly to the theme of slavery and employment, "This is totally different to the approach of Rome and it is based on sound economics. Slaves who work in Roman mines are usually criminals, they are treated cruelly, fed badly and nobody has any interest in their health. They have been sent to the mines to die and until they do so the mine owner tries to extract as much value from their bodies as possible. I cannot provide any figures to prove it, but it is my belief that a man who is healthy, well-fed and who knows that he will be going home in a few hours to enjoy his house, wife, children and the company of friends, will produce many times more tons of gold ore than a beaten, unhealthy slave, weakened by disease and hunger, who sees only death before him. In addition our miners are paid according to how much ore they extract. In a couple of months the mine at Cothi will be working under the new regime and I expect to make much more profit out of it than you ever could. What's more those men will be citizens and required to fight to protect the town should it be necessary - as will their wives and all children over the age of fourteen."

"Wives and children fighting?"

"Our women were on the ramparts here when your army attacked us Venutius, they operated the great wall ballistas, had spears and stones ready should you have got to the base of the wall. We have no scruples about women defending their homes - and it almost doubles our fighting strength. Practically our whole army can go off on campaign and leave the defence of the town to women, children and men too old to march. One thing more that you need to know about how our citizen's employment is managed. As in Rome there is free food, but also free housing and since we have no slaves there is no good reason for unemployment. Therefore all citizens are required to work or pay taxes. The work is not onerous - largely a matter of managing the crops, herds and maintaining the towns. Generally if a citizen performs the civic tasks it will take up half their day - four or five hours. For that, all citizens receive a citizen share which varies from season to season and represents the profits that we've made from crops, boards or any other business that the State deals in. If they do not perform their civic tasks, the share is removed from them.

If laziness, without good reason, becomes extreme, they are expelled. It is a simple set of rules which allows all citizens the option of working for themselves as well as for the State.

Taxes are paid on whatever the citizen earns, and by paying the civic tax, he or she may avoid the necessity to perform civic tasks."

"Most of these details will be handled by your clerks, but I wanted you to recognise the differences between the Rome you saw as a young man and Camelod. I believe we make better use of our civilian manpower than Rome. Rome became great by developing an efficient army and making the greatest possible use of its manpower, but they completely ignored the growing problem of a town population with little or nothing to do, no ambition (or at least no prospect of achieving one), housing that fostered disease and a disaffection with government to the point of widespread crime. We have no need to spend huge sums of money and a great deal of effort on games and, because we are still a small population, there is very little crime. The only capital crimes, incidentally, are murder and treason."

Gregory paused to slake his thirst and then continued, "All that, as I said will largely fall within the province of your clerks and the officers that you appoint to administer such functions as water works and sewage disposal, markets and civic taxes, trading and more taxes. For the most part I would like you to follow the Roman patternand if you are not sure of that, you will find that two of your senior clerks were administrative personnel in civitas in Gaul - they'll be only too happy to show off their knowledge."

"To the west of the lands that you will govern are the Brigante - as I am sure you are aware. We have a fortified town on the upper Ure, Ure Fortress, Pencalta and others down that river and the Ouse. To the east is New Derwenta and Old Derwenta - and, on the coast, the beginnings of a small port - Brido. As you can tell we have towns around the periphery of your province and nothing at the centre. From the point of view of defending it, that was fine, but a central town is needed for administration and to coordinate any defensive responses to invasion. The land is relatively flat, with numerous waterways, the high ground borders it to the west, most of the southern border and the east.

"Your main task will be to develop the province so that it has an administrative centre, efficient road and water transport, well developed farms for wheat, cattle, sheep and - in particular, horses. We have a herd of horses bred from those of Friesland, they stand over five feet at the shoulder and can carry a man with heavy armour and a twelve foot lance. They weigh half as much again as one of our existing heavy cavalry horses and can break through any infantry line - even Roman. So far we have four hundred - enough for half a

cohort, but we are doubling the herd every three years; you will be responsible for ensuring that programme goes well too.

"The towns will need to attract people. I will rely on you to make sure that these people become citizens and have a strong sense of belonging to Camelod. You should find it a rich province and four years is none to long to carry out the tasks that must fall to you, so I hold out the prospect of a second governorship if all is going well and promising to do better still. Let me warn you of one thing. In Rome a governorship is looked upon as a legitimate route to making a personal fortune - it will not be so in Camelod. You will have a legate's salary and twice a legate's civil shares; if the province makes money you will gain a share of it. That will be a great deal of money - you will have no need to seek any other means of income. Rome is corrupt and most of its governors are amongst the most corrupt men of the empire, I have no wish for us to emulate Rome in that matter.

"A full, mixed legion will be permanently attached to your office. It will be in the charge of a legate who is answerable to you, but, he is also answerable to General Lucius and if there is any doubt about the advisability of a military matter, the legate has the right to refer it to Lucius."

Gregory sat back again, he had been leaning forward to emphasize the various points.

"You said that I would have a 'mixed' legion. What, precisely is that, Lord Gregory?"

"It is a term that means nothing outside our own army - you're quite right to query it. Our establishment for a mixed legion consists of four cohorts of infantry, four cohorts of heavy cavalry and one cohort of mobile artillery (one hundred and twenty ballistas), that is a total of more than seven thousand men. It may seem a lot for a relatively small province, but in addition to garrison duty, armed responses, road and waterway building you will discover that the legion is involved in the building of towns, bridge building - and there will be a lot of that."

"Thank you, Lord. I never dreamt that I would have such a responsibility given to me. I am your man entirely. You will have no cause to be dissatisfied with your choice."

Gregory smiled and standing up again gave his hand to the prince, "There is one thing more. I have no doubts of your abilities, but I did not place you in the other part of our lands where you would be useful because that was along the Severn and reaching west into Cambria. The tribes in Cambria are more warlike and there is no question that you would have been a good man to have in charge there, but your reputation along the

Severn is that of a plunderer, a ravager. I believe I have chosen well in putting you in the new lands, but make sure that your reputation does not again lean towards rapine and pillage. These people are peaceable, I hope industrious - and they are citizens, your clerks will explain the body of law we've assembled to protect citizens. Treat them well and make me glad that I gave you the province. If you walk over to the praesidium, the legate's office will appoint clerks and scribes to help you set up your administration, and they will find you a decent temporary office here in Windubro. When you have your campaign mapped out, transfer the office to Ebor on the Ouse until a central town has been surveyed and built. I wish you luck Venutius."

Venutius came to attention and to Gregory's surprise gave him a legionary's salute, before turning on his heel and marching to the door - which miraculously opened just before he reached it. For a few seconds Gregory regarded the closed door. He was fairly sure that he had made a good choice, but Well if he was wrong, the growing intelligence networks should give him fair warning. Venutius was under his eye, well isolated from his former followers apart from some prominent men like Rhodri who were easy enough to keep an eye on in their turn - and if the prince did his job well, he would have little time for intrigue.

Cantodunon 43 AD

October.

A new extension to the bull hide maps hung on the wall of the praesidium's war room, it extended the previous extent by an ambitious fifty miles to the north of the river port of Afondon and reached sixty miles from the seacoast on the east into the land of the eastern Brigantes, provisionally placing their chief settlement of Olena forty miles to the west of Ebor. The towns that Camelod had established since the expeditions into the new territory - Afondon, Ebor, Isur, Pencalta and New Derwenta, were now joined by Ryedon on the river Rye and nestling up against the hill country to the north. Beyond it the valley of the Swale narrowed to less than ten miles. Ryedon did not sit at the centre of the new territory, but the argument that Venutius put forward was that it put a stopper in the valley and provided a good base for expansion into the highlands to east and west.

To the east the inhabitants were peaceable, to the west were the Brigante who were not, but the real point to Venutius's proposed strategy was that to the north of the eastern people - a matter of between ten and twenty miles, lay the estuary of the river Tees. If the Romans wanted to stir up trouble amongst the Brigante, their easiest line of communication for money, supplies and 'advisors' was through this estuary. It was not yet a port, but it was one in gestation. Leaving aside the likelihood of it being used by Rome

when the invasion of the south east of Britain took place (nobody doubted that it was now a matter of when it took place, not if), Camelod could make good use of it for trade.

Venutius's strategy had been approved by the High Council and now he had administrative offices in what was still only a fortified camp with a garrison of three cohorts. It was only a beginning, but even so, it was a good base for cavalry and mobile ballista patrols up to the Tees, to keep an eye on the small amount of river traffic there. The ballista could easily reach any boat travelling up from the estuary and the arboroleum bolts would be devastating against them.

On the lower half of the great map the scribes had entered another name, Lughdunon. Here was planned the capital city of Camilod and it was named in honour of the nation's God. At the moment it was merely a building site, marked out with gravel, with some work being done on two dams that would provide sufficient water for a large population. This was Gregory's personal project. From the information that Lucius's surveyors had brought him he had selected a small hill twelve miles to the south east of Clarbre. It stood out from the flat land around it by two hundred feet or so and was within easy reach of the Idle on one side and the Trent on the other. Five small streams sprang from its slopes and it was two of these that were being dammed. The town was to be built in a circle around the hill leaving a wooded parkland a mile across at its centre. All the buildings were arranged in concentric circles and Gregory calculated that the city would eventually hold well over one hundred thousand men, women and children - and if the population grew beyond that it would be simple enough to add one or two circles of houses, bath-houses, shops, warehouses etc. The city was intended to be the administrative heart of Camelod, but a large part of its population would work in the manufacturies and agricultural land that surrounded it. The unemployed, and poverty worn lower class of Rome would not appear here, he averred. Citizens of Lughdunon would have exactly the same rights as any other citizen, no more and no less.

But at the moment it was merely a set of attractive drawings in Gregory's study and the gravel lines that marked the roadways to be built first. Wealthy as the state was, he reckoned that it would be ten years and more before he saw it in its full glory - these buildings would not start life made from timber, but spring from the earth in free stone imported from the quarries around Eborac. It was, after all, not a utilitarian city that needed to be brought into operation, but an emblazonment for Camelod and a glorification of its' God, Lugh. It would never attain the splendour of Rome and other large continental cities. Gregory's ambition was for it to be solid and beautiful, and the money, that might have been spent on magnificent mansions and stadia costing tens of millions, would circulate and increase trade and manufacturing. He was, in fact, proposing a mild form of

sumptuary law. There would be amphitheatres and theatres of course, but he intended them to be 'modestly superior'. It was phrase he liked, doubtless he would have difficulty explaining its principles to his architects, but he would enjoy doing it. It was his opinion that architects needed to be bound by severely enforced rules, otherwise they overdecorated, became overly ambitious and massively exceeded the budget.

Camelod's strength and influence would be fostered by its trade, exports and, sooner or later, its army and navy - Britain was an island, it had to have a navy to protect its shores and shield its merchants as they traveled the world. That thought reminded him that he wanted to speak to Daffyd about his Venuti ancestors, reputedly their ships had been superior to the Roman and built for rough weather and voyages far from land.

For the next few months there would be peace in the land and, despite the expense of the war against Venutius, Camelod's economy had expanded. There had proved to be a huge market for the products of the furnaces, forges, foundries, potteries and board mills. On the advice of Huw, Secretary of Production, Camelod's women had almost ceased to work at the tedious business of spinning and had been trained to use their hand skills on the products of the stamping mills, potteries and other manufactories where the raw product could be profitably enhanced by decoration or finishing treatments. As a result, a large number of citizens who worked for the state instead of paying civic tax, no longer produced yarn, but carried out more lucrative work which more than paid for importing yarn.

One of the first results from the 'club' that Gregory had asked Heron to form from citizens who showed a bent for invention or development (it had been named the Philosopher's Club), had been in the field of pottery. The first was the use of a powered punch and a cast iron die to force a ball of prepared clay into the form of cups or quite tall cylindrical vessels, this was a simple extension of the use of pressure to make plates and shallow bowls of sheet bronze or clay. The second innovation came about because the man who had invented the rolls used in the fulling mills had seen one of Heron's 'curiosities', a cylinder seal from Babylonia. The seal was rolled by hand on soft clay and formed a design that was the seal of the owner. Ian the fulling mill master had linked the idea of the seal to the rollers he had invented some time ago for squeezing water from the cloth. Rollers of cast iron were made with designs cast into them and then sharpened in detail with chisels, and after a very short time, the first thin sheets were being placed on tables for the designs to be cut out with knives and the resulting plaques pasted onto plain clay vessels for firing. The water powered rolls produced the sheets very quickly indeed and twenty or thirty people were needed by the various potteries to handle the rest of the process of cleaning, polishing and sometimes gilding.

The complex of buildings that housed Heron's workshops and the Philosophers' Club was being extended away from the river bank for two more school rooms and accommodation for the men and women he was expecting from Alexandria. Heron had taken Gregory's suggestion that he contact some of his old academic acquaintances, quite seriously. Maria the Jewess, who had produced the spirits he had revived Gregory with after his shock at the total annihilation of his family; two fellow engineers Pratibus and Michael and the man he was waiting for most impatiently, Archimedes. The bearer of that illustrious name was no descendant of the great man, but he had skills in the manufacture of small mechanisms such as gears, and the grinding of lenses and magnifying mirrors that would allow Heron to make a trial of some new ideas that lacked local skills to bring them to fruition. Heron had monopolised the best stone masons recently for an amplification of another of his 'toys'. Cantodunon's water mills had reached the limit of the head of water raised by the dam and, in casting around for a solution to the problem of a growing need for power, he had thought back to the organ powered by wind vanes he had shown to the priests of Isis - unsuccessfully. It had worked, but they had no inclination toward musical instruments of that size.

Several structures of timber had been constructed on the right bank before arriving at the design that was now being built in stone a mile away on a slight rise on the other side of the river. Rising to a height of fifty feet it had vanes that rotated around a horizontal axle at the top of the tower. The vanes themselves would almost touch the ground and were five times larger than the ones that powered the organ. Its' position had been chosen to take advantage of the prevailing wind. Because it was relatively slow, Heron saw it as a means of grinding grain, freeing two of the watermills for manufacturing processes. It would be months before it would be ready because the problem of keeping the vanes facing into the wind had not been solved satisfactorily.

River traffic along the Trent had expanded greatly and more docks were in preparation on the left bank at Cantodunon (above and below the dam bridge), to deal solely with transshipment to Gaul and Hispania. At least three ships a day left the docks and, of course, a similar number arrived, although the majority of them were in ballast, for although Camelod's imports had swelled, it was not by anything like the increase in export. As a reflection of this, Cantodunon now had four bankers in the town - two Hebrews, an Alexandrian and a Roman.

Peace was secure for the moment in Britain, the winter months would prevent any crossing of the channel by Roman troops and Venutius's defeat had dissuaded any Brigante chieftain or prince from following his example. The Catuvellauni in the south east

were fully employed in settling the lands they had won from their neighbours and exacting tribute. Cunobal, whose shield they had been for the formative years at Windubro, had been dead for two years at least and still his two sons were safely embroiled with each other, striving for supremacy and the inheritance of their father's southern empire. There was no indication that either of them was sufficiently in the ascendancy to turn towards Camelod. However, Lucius's spies had brought news of the two exiled kings Berica and Cogidumnos who had been making promises to their remaining nobles. By all accounts Berica was already back in the country and Cogidumnos was expecting to return with the Romans very shortly. Perhaps that was what was keeping the sons of Cunobal in the south.

"No, the winter will be peaceful whatever summer brings." Gregory decided as he sat with Myrcal in the small sitting room on the second floor, looking out through the glazed windows across the bustling town. A Myrcal's sharp glance satisfied her that her husband was simply indulging in one of his infrequent solo conversations. She smiled indulgently, it had startled her the first time it happened, but now she accepted it as just one of his eccentricities - there was no need to respond. Nevertheless, she noted it for later reference. Sometime in the near future she would use it to bolster his belief that she could read his mind. That was very useful.

Three roads led down to the town, the riverside workshops and warehouses. Originally built a standard thirty feet wide, they were now being widened for they were the links to a network of roads that came from the south, east and (via the river crossing), the west. Traffic was heavy and its rumble could be heard even though the closed windows. Gregory was reminded of his student days in Heron's workshops in Alexandria. That city was so crowded that the commercial traffic was forbidden the city in the daytime. Surprisingly he could not remember being kept awake by the night-time noise. Despite the rumble and the knowledge that it might well get much worse over the next few years, husband and wife enjoyed the view and the noise. Their city was living and thriving. Its citizens were for the most part well off and all ate well and lived in housing that thousands of the poorer Roman citizens would have killed for. A small number of men and women were arraigned by the town council every month, who for one reason or another had failed to honour their civic debt of labour or tax, and a proportion of them had their citizenships revoked and were exiled. In the main, though, most of these defaulters had good reason to fail in their duty and the council was more often concerned with ensuring that they would be excused tax or some other amelioration applied. The citizens of Cantodunon were generous in their dealings with one another. Gregory hoped that increasing personal wealth would not obliterate this typically Celtic social behaviour.

Celtic Empire - Camelod

In two days time it would be the end of October and the night of Samhain, the end of the third Celtic quarter. The fires would burn brightly, the people would be feasting enthusiastically on the livestock culled for the winter and the imported delicacies that Camelodians had developed a taste for these last three years. There was much to celebrate, the recent census had shown a total population of well over fifty thousand citizens in June and a sum of fifteen million sesterces to divide between them as the annual citizen share. However, when the preparations for invasion that Drusus warned of accelerated, trade to Gesoriacum would be cut drastically because of the hundreds of Roman transports that would crowd the harbour. Alternative ports on the Rhine would be available, but the flow of goods would most probably slow down so long as Rome's military preparations were in train. That would be true whether the invasion took place next summer, or not.

For the present though, times were good and the King and the people of Camelod had no doubt that their legion would persuade the invaders that it would be better to limit themselves to the rich south eastern and southern kingdoms, rather than attempt to take over the midlands. Camelod's armed forces now numbered more than twenty five thousand men and boys, only half of them fully trained and experienced, but they had every right to expect that by the time the south had been pacified, Camelod would possess the equivalent of five full legions. That military strength and their commercial successes bred a countrywide optimism for the future. On Samhain the legion would celebrate its victory of April, a new battle standard with its silver boar would be presented to the cohort of light cavalry, and all the standards would receive a new battle honour to mount beneath their own silver boars. There would be a display by the newly honoured light cavalry, performances of harpists, drummers, singers and dancers, a procession from the display field to the Nematon and then the fires would be lighted, the feasting begin and after that there would doubtless be a large number of future citizens quickened.

Mam Tor in the Brigante country North Britain

October AD 43

The 'Man' woke abruptly. It had been a deep sleep, but an exhausting one and the images still swirled clear in the forefront of his brain. It was a message sure enough, he thought as he sat on the edge of the sleeping shelf, with his hair wild on his head and his shirt twisted about his body by the turmoil of his dreaming., but what message? The threat had been strong, the direction had seemed to be from the south and then, whatever Gods had sent the dream had teased him with a vivid picture of a female wolf and a boar with golden tushes - and a Hell of a lot of blood.

He shook his head in disgust, it was no minor prophecy. This feeling of deep cold in the pit of his belly had only accompanied those warnings that were of great significance; it was his task to drag more explicit meaning from the dream. It meant the gathering and steeping of the fly agaric, the sacred scarlet cap with white flakes that might bring a clearer revelation or, if his judgement was less than perfect, simple death. The Man snorted in irritation, were the Gods malicious or simply thoughtless humourists, that they bound up their warnings so obscurely and dangerously ? If they thought it worthwhile to communicate at all, why not in language that a man could read without risking his life or sanity ?

A female wolf and a boar ? Symbolism ! With an oath he crashed one great fist onto the straw mattress and then lumbered to his feet without bothering to look at the woman he had startled from her own deep sleep. The morning was barely alive, a clear sky, but no sun above the silhouette of the hills and brisk enough to make the exchange of bed shirt for plaid a rapid one. Brisk enough too to give urgency to his hunting through the little larder for cold porridge to slice and heat on the skillet. Early enough for last night's banked fire to need little coaxing back into brightness.

The farm was small in terms of land and large in terms of family, with three wives to house and close to a score of progeny ranging from one year to twelve - the older children had left and set about their own breeding programmes. The Man was an oddity amongst this Scantii community isolated in what was generally Brigante country. No druid, but a holy man nevertheless. Well over six feet tall and the shoulders and swag of a bear he had a presence that was more than bulk. A prominent brow over deep set eyes dominated long, flat features. The Man was a throwback to an earlier Celt, but marked with a head of thick red hair that bristled with wiry stiffness. Where he came from was a mystery and had been for twenty years. What he was, was mysterious too, but at least a name could be put to it, The Man was a finder and a weather prophet. If a knife was lost, or a beast or a human being, he could find it or them. If an unseasonable drought or frost or storm was decreed by the fates, The Man often gave warning enough for his neighbours to make the best of a bad job and change the order of their planting or harvesting - the small benefit this brought could make the difference between a merely hungry winter - and starvation. The tough farmers of these bleak hills appreciated that difference and their offerings made the feeding of his own brood a little easier than his indifferent husbandry accounted for. And occasionally he dreamed the fate of the tribe.

Prophets are rare and prophets that sometimes brought a message that allowed the tribe to prepare for a calamity - it was always calamity - were rarer still. The Man had first appeared at Mam Tor six months before the Scotta made their great raid up the Mersey

from Ireland, and the warnings of the huge stranger had been given credence from the start. Why he should have come to them, even where he had come from was not known, but not one man of the hillsides had scoffed, and before the houses and barns of other tribes had blossomed into the night flowers of pillage, the Scantii had taken their possessions and herds into the hidden valleys of the Pennines two days to the east

He had no other name. He was The Man - and his having three wives - and a dozen not quite - was rarely commented upon. People walked around him with care. The Man was never known to have been violent, (when he was drunk he fell decently upon his back and went to sleep), but he gave the impression that massive violence was tethered by a mere gossamer. The Scantii regarded him with great pride and a deal of careful courtesy. How he regarded himself could not even be guessed at, even his families knew him as 'The Man' and so far as anyone knew, no hint of his past had ever passed his lips even in the home.

He ate now with an economy of effort that was voracious yet neat, quickly despatching two thick palm sized slices (his palm size) of the skillet-browned porridge without bothering to sit at the rough table; he washed it down with half a jug of water, washed his face and hands in the remainder and then, drying himself on a corner of his plaid as he went, left the house in search of the agaric. It would take him a full day to find, gather and treat the fungus so that it was ready to take - and he felt a powerful urgency to waste no time in setting about his dangerous mind journey.

November 43

The Man had traveled along the Pennines for twenty days before his dreams told him where the message had to be delivered. It was not that he was stupid, it was simply that when the gift of prophecy came upon him it never occurred to him to make his own determination as to the destination. If it was not made clear to him in the dream he wandered more or less aimlessly in the general direction that would be needed, but with no precise aim.

From past experience he knew that there was no point in turning to the mushroom for guidance, it did not work - and on the two occasions that he had tried to force it by that means he had been very ill. So he wandered, waiting. The tribes around his home village recognised him, fed him, provided a roof (but never their homesteads) and otherwise kept well clear. He was far from his own territory now, but the form of his strangeness was not unknown and he fared in only slightly worse fashion. On the twentieth night he dreamt again.

"I have a message! I have a message! .. "

The raucous voice roared over the mist-laden valley, softened only a little by the vapour. The repetition was almost ludicrous, but the Brigantes roused from their beds well before sunrise had no inclination to laugh, the huge figure who strode through the fog, with disordered hair and glaring eyes, was very clearly in the grip of a god. At the centre of the walled settlement crouched at the valley bottom, a ring of warriors stood guard at the doors of a large roundhouse. This was the point that The Man aimed for and when he reached it he stood stock still and, for a brief time, silent, before declaiming in a more normal tone, "I have come to see Queen Cartimandua - my message is for her."

Then he waited without making another sound.

Quickly a crowd formed around him, but well beyond arm's reach - and they too waited and chattered until the tall figure of the Brigantean Queen appeared at her doorway. She stood for a few seconds and then, when it was clear that The Man was not about to deliver his message in public, beckoned him to follow and went back into the roundhouse. The crowd clustered at a respectful distance from the Queen's house and waited. They waited a long time, but in the end the message was relayed to them and they savoured its drama with the appetite that all crowds have for catastrophes in a distant place.

The Man returned to his village next day and did not know, nor did he wish to know whether his prophetic warnings had been heeded or not., but his tribe had heard the warning at second hand - and several days after the author had taken up residence again - there had been a meeting of the Scanti headmen held in this very village. Just twelve elderly men represented the leadership of this tribe of four thousand scattered over a few hills between the Brigante and Cornovi. They were poor, their population depleted and their best lands had been taken by the Brigante over the last two or three generations - and what they had left now was hill land with grazing for sheep and goats, and three small valleys that produced barely enough wheat and barley to feed themselves from one year to the next.

Brigantean conquest had reduced the numbers of fighting men to a hundred or so, the rest were women, children and a handful of old men aged fifty and more. Consequently the tribe was much weaker than their population indicated, half were boys between five and twelve years of age, useful for minding the livestock, grubbing the fields, but incapable of reconquering the lost land. Both the Cornovi to the south and the Brigante to the north ignored them as being insignificant and owning nothing that either neighbour would want. It was the only reason for their continued existence as a tribe. Now, insignificance would

be no protection. With the Romans sweeping across the country, and the Brigante pledged to support them against the Cornovi, the Scanti would be wiped from the record, their little farms burned, their two small hill forts ploughed over. Their support was not needed by anyone, what use were one hundred warriors in the battles to come? They would simply be a nuisance and neither the Cornovi or the Brigante would have any compunction about clearing them out of the way, using the women and enslaving the boys.

The meeting was held out of doors, for none of the small houses could accomodate the headmen and the leading warriors. It was a sombre affair even though the weather had been kind to them, and the headmen sat in a small circle with the villagers gathered around. There was one person there who was not of the Scanti, a bardoi, short, lean and with features that began with a sharp jaw and ended in a horizontal line of hair just half a hand's breadth below the top of his head. He was the more remarkable in being the only person there with even the hint of a smile upon his face. What was said here would reach the ears of the druidic college very quickly.

"People of the Scanti," A balding robust elder rose to his feet, crossed his arms over the thrust of his belly and addressed the circle. "We have heard what The Man foretold, and now we have heard of the invasion that will take place in the south." He indicated the bardoi as the source of this news. "The wolf is, of course the Roman Empire, the boar..."

The man paused, what he had been told of the prophesy and what the bardoi had had to say made no real sense to him. He had heard of Rome, but Camelod was totally unknown to him, "The boar is a new nation to the east of us and along the Trent. The druids report that it is militarily strong and growing fast, that it seeks friends and immigrants no matter how weak - and it is itself a subject of an ancient prophesy."

The man sighed, pulled his shoulders back a little, "Now, I've seen sixty eight summers and I have never heard of this prophesy," the bald head shook admonitorily at the bardoi as he seemed about to interupt. "Yey, yes, I know. Not all prophesies are common knowledge and the more important they are then the more like they are to be kept close by the druids.

"So what is my advice? Well we know The Man's prophesies. We may be few in numbers now, but we would have been fewer still if he had not warned us of the great raid, and we would have seen starvation more frequently if he had not told us of storms, and frosts and droughts to come, so that we could harvest early, spread straw or move our grazing in time. And he saw the wolf and the boar warring on each other; he saw the boar triumphant

and the bleeding wolf sprawled across the land of the Catuvellauni. The bardoi tells us that we will die if we stay here, but would be welcome if we travelled to the land of the boar - Camelod?" The bardoi nodded his affirmation. "To Camelod. I say we should take his advice." He sat down.

"Drago has put it clearly," The second speaker was much the same age and might have been a brother by the close resemblance; he addressed the meeting in the same pose, "We can stay and, it seems, be annihilated or we can take our flocks, gather our stores and households and walk across Britain to the land of Camelod. I don't know how far that is, I can guess that many of us will probably die on the way, but it is a chance for our children to live.

"I say we should travel."

Not all the headmen agreed to the exodus, but they were three only and it was late in the afternoon - it was pointed out to them firmly that there was no reason to carry on the debate.

Drago stood once again and turned to face the crowd around the circle, "It is decided; we obey the advice of the druids. Tomorrow you will begin preparations for the journey and Hunna...." A tall, greying warrior stood up in response, a slight smile on his scarred features, "...you will lead a party of six to let the Camelodians know we are coming and see if they can send us help on the way - food and wagons - I have no doubt that we shall need them by the time deep winter straddles the roads."

"We will mark a route that avoids the settlements of the Cornovi, but will the bardoi tell them why we are moving through their lands?"

The little man smiled broadly, "Not why, surelybut that no harm will come to their people and property thereby."

"That will be very convenient, thank you." The warrior spoke to one or two others in the crowd and then they all strode off to find the rest of those chosen for the pathfinders. Two men stood a little way out of the crowd, neither had voted for the exodus and neither was content to leave matters like this. They were cousins, but their similarity despite twenty years difference in age, was marked.

The older man spoke first. "This is stupidity. One final stupidity on top of all the rest." Mirlan was a stocky, sturdy man of about fifty years, his dark square features were fiercely

animated as he went on, "When the Brigante took the northern farms, whose land was split to accept those who survived? Mine." A heavy fist struck his chest in emphasis, "Mine."

Dergol nodded, it was true that other farms had been forced to accept the remnants of the displaced people, but equally true that Mirlan had suffered more than most because his farm was the largest, stretching over six hundred acres of valley and lower slopes. Now he had less than half that.

"Dergol man, I'm not a vicious man, but ..." The hand that had gripped the younger man's arm tightened painfully, "I don't forget. We have cousins among the Brigante mind. I want you to visit them when the march begins - the confusion will conceal your absence."

"That I can do, Merlan, nothing easier." Dergol was a taller version of his kinsman with the same dark features and deep set eyes. He was clad in tunic and treads that had seen better days and there were none of the torcs and rings that served as evidence of prowess in a warrior. The battles he had fought in the last decade or so had brought him no wealth other than the odd pony and a few weapons. The Scanti were so weakened now that they were permanently on the defensive.

He was thinking over Merlan's brief words as his eyes kept a wary watch for anybody who might be taking an interest in their conversation. "And what then, cousin?"

The older man shook his head impatiently, "I don't know yet, do I? Just make contact, tell them where we're heading. From what The Man prophesied, the Brigante and Rome will be in conflict soon with this people to the east. If a man cannot make a gain from such a situation he ought to be shamed."

Dergol looked down at his companion, speculation clear in his eyes, "You think we can benefit, Merlan?"

"Of course. Information is always valuable." Reaching out he drew the tall warrior towards him, "You are to tell them, what is happening here and what we want when we have useful information."

"And that is?"

"Land, man. Land. Some of that rich valley land north of here where we can breed horses and grow barley. There'll be men killed soon and all we need is a binding promise to gift me a large farm, and you ... whatever you want to make for a comfortable life."

Dergol's idea of a comfortable life was different from Merlan's, but he grunted in assent and put his mind to deciding what he would ask for when the time came. He was quite confident that it **would** come - and most likely in the next six months. He was sadly mistaken. Both men were to learn quickly that Cartimandua had lost interest in Camelod since Venutius had suffered so badly at their hands. She despised her prince, but even so could acknowledge that he was a good general - his loss of twelve thousand fighting men in two years was not one she had any intention of emulating.

Two weeks later their grain, livestock and chattels were ready to form part of the cavalcade. The tribe owned three wagons, the rest was loaded onto packmules and cattle - the women and the older children walked. The warriors marched unencumbered by anything, but their weapons and made some attempt to flank the shambling mass that set out across the hills. It was not the quickest nor the easiest route, but it avoided the rich land of the Cornovi, weaving across the hills of the Pennines and then looping down towards the Dove and its confluence with the Trent at Windubro. It was a distance of about one hundred miles and it took them ten days to cover a quarter of it.

Clarbre

AD 44 Beltane

On the last day of April, the gleaming limestone porticos of the colleges of Clarbre reflected the afternoon sun onto the crowd that had gathered on the assembly ground. It was a well behaved, happy gathering of men, women and children the great majority of whom had traveled for some hours to celebrate the night of Beltane. At their centre stood the painted nematon, a tall pine that had been stripped and smoothed for the purpose and within a small circular arena marked with white stones, the bardoi sang, played harps, drums and pipes or recited the histories and stories of the Celtic tribes of these lands. The nematon was not a God nor yet a symbol of a God, it was the focus of the congregation and raise their gaze to the heavens - for that was where Lugh, the God of Camelod resided, overlooking the whole land - and no small event escaped his eyes.

The gathering was informal, giving its attention to the performances at times and at others, treating them as an accompaniment to their personal affairs. Family groups sat on the grass, eating and drinking moderately, chatting, listening to the family tales or histories that their elders recited, sometimes singing quietly so as not to interfere with whatever the

bardoi were doing and then taking their attention away from the family circle to pay closer attention to some performance of a bardoi that caught their interest. The weather was ideal for this third Beltane gathering at Clarbre, warm and dry and bright and the assembly of more than seven thousand generated an almost tangible column of joy that lifted on the warm air and ascended in a column to the sky.

At the centre of the bardoi, his chair set just in front of the Nematon, Medoc sat and beamed on his people. Clarbre was unique, the first college of druidism ever to have been built and Lugh was its sole God, a benevolent non-being who held one hand over the people to shelter them while bestowing the gifts of art, agriculture and knowledge with the other. Medoc believed in his God with a passion that had lasted for three quarters of his long life, growing stronger with age and now the work of sixty years was close to achieving what he had dreamt of when he first came across the religions of the Mediterranean, in particular the God of the Jews. Monotheism welded that people of many tribes into a whole, that had held through a multiplicity of vicissitudes - it would do the same for his native land of Britain. Clarbre was the seat of his version of druidism; it would never be a temple, druidism had no temples - it would be impious to attempt to locate a God, to limit his worship and celebration to a building.

There was a broad streak of the politician in Medoc and when he looked back over his life, he sometimes doubted that the machinations that had led to the growth of Windubro, Cantodunon and finally Camelod had been totally inspired by Lugh - or were, perhaps, tainted a little by his own ambition.

There would be no universal God in Britain without Camelod, whatever the motives that had created it, that fact was enough to satisfy him. And it was intensely satisfying to survey his people now. To hear their voices, see their pleasure and know of their strength. Medoc had served his God well - and there was more to come. A slight smile creased the lined, foxy face; oh yes, there was more - and it would be revealed to his people today. He wriggled into the soft cushions that cradled his lean buttocks and waited, secure in the knowledge of a future that an unkind person might say was of his contriving, but, "I am only the servant of Lugh, my deeds obey his will." It was a murmur that was unheard by the acolytes on either side of his chair - and it was just as well, perhaps.

The afternoon drifted towards evening, out of the sight of the congregation, hidden by the encircling woods of Clarbre, the Beltane fires were being lighted. The voices were a little louder now, the mild drinking had lowered inhibitions and families were not so considerate of their neighbours in keeping their conversation within the family circle. That noise was quite suddenly reduced as a tall figure appeared at the entrance to the western

processional way, the abrupt local silence spreading quickly until all were staring at the burly, wild haired figure outlined by the reddening sky behind him. It was The Man - at his side the smaller figure of the bardoi who had followed him in his travels. Cambel seethed with frustration, it was his task to report The Man's doings to the college and now, as he stood breathless from his efforts to keep up with the big man, he had momentous news. In the bothy they had slept in two nights ago, The Man had spoken in his sleep - roared would have been a better description. Then practically leaping from his blankets, he strode off into the night with Cambel in pursuit. After a hectic two days of travel the bardoi had just managed to keep at his heels.

He was exhausted. He stood behind The Man with no hope now of delivering his report to Medoc, before The Man delivered it himself. It was unfair, he almost cried when The Man started forward again into the silence of the wondering gathering, striding to the central circle where he gazed down at Medoc, seated in his ceremonial chair.

"I am The Man and the Great God Lugh has revealed his words to me." He swung around to confront his audience, the ragged cloak swinging from his shoulders, seemed almost to flap about his burly figure; greasy hair framed his livid face in dirty coils and as his mouth opened it revealed a rampart of dingy teeth fronting a maw that seemed impossibly red.

"This is the testament of the Great God Lugh."

The tone of his voice suddenly softened, although it had the same volume, "The God Lugh is the supreme God, all other gods are merely his servants, as are the Druids.

In the beginning Lugh created man and woman from a piece of his own heart.

Thus all men and women hear the God in their hearts and Lugh hears the thoughts and prayers of all men and women in His heart.

Lugh welcomes worship within His sacred places, but only as a compliment to His goodness. A pure and sincere heart is a temple to Lugh and no other is needed.

Be certain that all prayers are heard by Lugh and all covenants made with Him will be remembered for ever.

Lugh keeps all covenants - unless the people do not honour them also.

Do not call on the name of Lugh, except in worship, for this is an impertinence.

Obey the Laws of Lugh as revealed to the Druids and write them on sheets of gold, which is everlasting.

This land is the Land of Lugh and its' people are fortunate indeed."

His neck bent backwards so that his last words were delivered to the darkening sky - and at that moment exhaustion seemed to overcome him completely. His knees bent and he slowly crumpled to the grass, falling flat on his back with his chest labouring for breath.

Medoc regarded the recumbent figure with an expression that showed a little irritation. Although a devout follower of his God, he had come to suspect that Lugh had a sense of humour. Why could he not have allowed The Man to collapse gracefully after delivering his testament, instead of rolling onto his back in this ridiculous fashion?

"Lord."

"Hmm?" the bardoi who had been given the task of accompanying The Man was eager to say something now that he had recovered his own breath.

"Yes, bardoi. What is your name?"

"Cambel, Lord and Lugh has decreed that I shall speak to the people of Camelod."

Medoc could not help thinking that the recumbent figure of the giant (now snoring mightily) and the short, self important Cambel made a comical contrast, his mouth twitched but he controlled his features and indicated with a nod that the man should proceed.

"Many centuries ago the land of Britain consisted of small tribes and kingdoms that constantly warred with on another. Maiming and murdering, cattle raiding, raping and insulting the women of their neighbours until the great God Lugh became impatient with them, that they wasted their manhood and wealth in constant strife. And so He spoke from the top of Mam Tor so that the whole of the land could hear Him.

"You are an unruly people, a disgrace to Me and a stain upon this fair, green land. It is My will that you change your ways and become peaceful, strong and a pleasure for Me to look upon.

"This land shall be one Land with one King and that King will be the anointed of Lugh. And the anointed shall rule all this Land and impose My Laws, and so shall his descendants from his sons and daughters through all the generations. And this shall be."

"Lugh overlooked the land for a man of pure, strong heart and determination until he found such a one in the very middle of the land. He was a tall man with an open face, young, but recognised by his peers as being truly honest and not serving the needs of the moment. His name was Arto.

Lugh revealed His face to Arto (as he never had to any other man before), and said to him, "If you will worship me and bring the people to worship me alone and obey my Laws, I will covenant with you to give you dominion over this land and this people, for all time, even down to your furthest generation. Will you so covenant?"

Arto was silent, for he was amazed, and answered not.

Lugh asked him again, "Will you covenant to worship me and acknowledge my Laws?"

But Arto was still struck dumb, for he was in great fear of the awesome being that was revealed to him.

A third time the great God Lugh demanded answer and finally Arto took hold of his courage and made a solemn pledge to worship Lugh and lead the people to Him that they might worship Him and keep the Law of the good God Lugh. And Lugh withdrew from his sight, but left a gleaming sword as a sign of the covenant that existed between him and Arto and Arto's people.

Arto took the sword of iron and gold and went forth and gathered followers and formed an army which triumphed over all who opposed them. Thus it was that after one score of years the Land was whole. Arto was its' King and Lugh its' only God and the people obeyed the Law. They were a joy to Lugh their God, who bestowed wealth upon them and kept sickness from their children and their herds.

In the thirty fifth year of his rule Arto travelled to a distant part of his kingdom and sojourned with a baron of those parts. The baron was elderly and had recently take a young wife called Gwenifar - a woman of shining beauty. Arto was in his fifth decade and thought a modest man by his subjects, with no thought of evil. A man who obeyed the Law of Lugh rigorously and who had never sought the company of any woman other than his queen Morgit.

"But the sight of Gwenifar set his heart to beat the faster, the sound of her voice when she spoke and when she sang the ancient songs of the bardoi, inflamed his brain - and the touch of her hand aroused his loins in a manner unbecoming of a man of probity and honour. Arto took the wife of his baron and when the noble remonstrated with the King in the court, Arto slew him - cutting off his head with the great shining sword of iron and gold given him by Lugh.

"As the bleeding body lay on the floor of the court a terrible voice was heard by all present, "Thou hast broken thy covenant with me! The Law has been flouted and a great sin committed with the sword of righteousness. I withdraw my favour from the people of this Land and from its King. Behold!" And a lightening bolt struck the great doors of the court and they fell and a chill wind howled through it, filling all with fear and apprehension.

"Then followed years of turmoil. Rebellion spread throughout the land and although Arto prostrated himself in the great temple of Lugh and sought forgiveness and followed the Law scrupulously from that moment on - and dismissed the woman Gwenifar to the Holy Island to live a life far from men - the great God Lugh did not reveal His face to him again and the Land sank into dissension and lawlessness. Before his last battle with rebellion Arto gave all his wealth to be distributed amongst his people and on the very field of battle pleaded with the Lord Lugh to forgive His people and open His face to them again, "For the fault was mine and mine alone. Take my life and return Thy presence to the people."

"Arto's prayer was heard. A great light was seen in the sky and it shed a bolt which made a hole in the earth between the two armies, while a voice declaimed, "I am the Great God Lugh and these are My people, but because of the sin of Arto their King they will not be whole until I bring another King from a far land. And his soul shall be Arto's soul and he will join the Land in all its parts so that it be whole again and Camelod lives once more."

"Then the battle was fought. All day the armies strove against each other until eventually that of Arto was triumphant and the rebels fled from the field in disarray. In the last moments the leader of the rebels turned and flung a spear which pierced Arto's lung. It was a fatal wound, the King sat in his saddle still, but was doomed. As he felt his life ebbing away, he called to the God Lugh, "Lord God, I sinned and was punished, but I have kept faith with You ever since and truly repented my error. I call upon You now to honor Your covenant and restore the light of Your presence to Your people in Love and Mercy."

"And the hill that bore the mounted King was bathed in light and a voice was heard, "I forgive you Arto. Your people shall be reunited as I promised - when the stranger King

arrives on these shores and makes himself known by his deeds. Come home Arto, who sinned, but the once - and truly repented."

"As the King turned his horse towards the light he spoke his last words in this world, "Fear Lugh alone and keep the law - With His Grace, I shall return." He and his fluttering banner with the device of a golden crane waited quietly on the hill - and then the light took him and faded and the horse was left standing quietly with no sign of his rider, nor any trace of armour or caparison.

"After a moment it trotted down the hill and began to graze amongst the dead and wounded of that terrible field.

"This is the legend of Arto and Camelod his Kingdom."

Cambel's recital was much the same as the one that had been delivered by bardoi at the naming of Camelod, but it was couched in the modern language and there were touches here and there that were undoubtedly his own. There was a polite tapping of hands on knees by the seated crowd and then a gentle murmur as children turned to parents and parents to grandparents to question them. The Celts were still a people whose history was carried by word of mouth from generation to generation - and provenance and comparison with other oral records that paralleled a recital, were important in establishing its veracity. There was little to compare Cambel's recital with, except the obscure earlier version in the old language that had been heard four years ago in Windubro.

Medoc interrupted the informal discussions by standing and lifting his hands, "Citizens of Camelod, Children of Lugh." The silence became even more intense for that phrase had never been used before and it seemed to mark a change in their status.

The old man smiled, content that he had made a point that would be discussed later. "It is getting dark, the fires are lighted on the hillside and it is Beltane. Let us leave this holy place and feast and sing and dance, although I .." His hands made a deprecating gesture at his aged body. "...will be happy to simply feast while you enjoy yourselves. Come, the fires and roasting spits await us." He sat down in his chair again and his acolytes lifted it up and bore him in triumph along the western processional way. It was a happy, boistrous, uplifted crowd that followed to the feasting ground.

The news was brought to a bleary eyed Brioc shortly after sunrise. He was not at his best having miscalculated the number of cups of winter mead he had consumed halfway

through the celebrations at Cantodunon. He took the time to freshen himself up - the matter was not a matter of urgency, and then took himself off to the State House.

"I wish to speak with Lord Gregory." He announced to the major domo.

"Certainly sir. Will you wait here..." He indicated the seating in the atrium, "...or in the garden? It is sheltered there and quite warm now."

"The garden if you will."

Gregory and Myrcal joined him very shortly, clearly they had been awake for some time. "Brioc, we did not expect to see you so early this morning." Clearly his drinking had been noticed, Brioc was mortified, he shrugged, "I hadn't intended to call on you so early either, but there has been an event at Clarbri that you ought to know about, Lord .. and Lady."

"Is it urgent? No? Well, will you sit down and we can have breakfast together?" Brioc sat on one of the chairs that servants seemed to have produced by some sort of conjuring trick and had no time to do more than make a few polite comments on the garden before flagons of wine and water had been set before him and he was biting into hot, crisp bread rolls. He nodded his thanks and then, between bites, told them of the events at Clarbri. The appearance of The Man, the testament and the slightly modified version of the Arto legend.

Myrcal wiped her mouth daintily on an embroidered linen cloth, "This prophet - The Man - and his testament ...are they genuine?"

This was an embarrassing question for Brioc who had been made privy to much of Medoc's plans in the last year or two. At the same time he had formed the impression that Medoc himself was not clear about the source of the prophesies, simply that he had made sure that The Man appeared at the right place and the right time. "I believe so, Lady"

Gregory had noted the hesitation and was aware that Medoc was grooming the druid to take his place when the time came. "I suspect that you could believe anything if you set your mind to it, my friend. The point is do the people see it as truth?"

"I am in agreement with Medoc you know, on the value of monotheism. I too see it as a necessity if we are to make a single nation in Britain that will last after the three of us are dead, but I hope that the archdruid is not manipulating events. Invented prophesies and

testaments will not do, you know. Sooner or later the deception will come to light and cast doubt on any true beliefs."

Brioc hastened to reassure the king, "The Man is well known, Lord. He has made prophesies before and they have come true. There is not doubt at all that this testament was not put in his mind by any human agency. He is not a man who could be influenced by another man .. or woman. And the legend has been known amongst the more accomplished bardoi for centuries."

Myrcal enquired, "How many centuries, Brioc?"

He gave a short laugh, "No-one knows Lady. Druids measure time by generations and this legend has never been linked to line of descent, nor yet to a succession of reigning houses ... there have been no reigning houses of any great importance since Arto. Cunobal and his sons are descended from invaders who arrived a mere three generations ago. No. Apart from knowing that it is of great antiquity (largely because of the language it was couched in), we can only say that Arto's rule ended some hundreds of years since."

"What does the college intend to do with this testament, then?" Gregory saw his dream - a fairly recent dream - of a unified nation throughout most of, even all of, Britain was becoming a strong possibility.

"I am told that Medoc has already donated the gold for the sheets that will bear the testament. Ten pounds of gold, Lord."

"Substantial sheets then?"

"Yes, Lord Gregory. And Medoc has ordered that the sheets be mounted on a stone at the east side of the Nematon at Clarbre."

"Looking into the sunrise?"

"Yes, Lord."

"And you received all this information this morning?"

"The man rode through the night."

"Well, Brioc. If the archdruid agrees, Camelod will pay for stones to be erected in every town with the testament written in letters of gold."

"Letters of gold, Lord?"

"It will put less of a strain on the treasury than ten pounds of gold for every town we establish. At a guess, I would say that letters will take less than a quarter of the gold that sheets would take."

"Can you apply commercial values to the celebration of Lugh's words, Lord?" Brioc's sensibilities were offended.

His king smiled at him, "I can and so, I believe, would Medoc, have done had not the message explicitly stated sheets of gold. Those sheets are the originals and will be made to the God's commands, the others are merely copies."

"As you say, Lord."

Gregory and Myrcal exchanged glances, they did not need to put their individual thoughts into words, the situation they had discussed so often seemed to be coming into existence. The Man's prophesies and testament were a unifying force for Camelod - and Brioc's news made clear that it was not only accepted by the Druidical college, but was being enthusiastically promoted. Medoc was undoubtedly wealthy and the provision of the sheets of gold would put no strain on his finances, nevertheless neither of them thought that he would donate it unless he had complete confidence in the future. Despite the changes in the teachings of the druidical college for these last three years, The Man's testament and the druid's whole hearted acceptance of it was an even more radical step.

Myrcal made a deduction that took her husband by surprise, "Medoc believes that the Romans will invade this year, doesn't he, Brioc?"

Gregory had not expected this and neither had the druid, "Why do you say that, Lady?"

A small smile twisted her lips as she pointed out, "A step like this, directly into monotheism, requires an outside force, a threat, to concentrate the people's minds. There has to be an outside force to 'encourage' unification and the desire to strengthen the influence of the druids." Her gaze divided itself between Gregory and Brioc equally, "It is common knowledge that the Romans aim to exterminate druidism, that is why so many have flocked to Clarbre these last twelve months. If the invasion is imminent then so is

the threat. Without that imminent threat, druids might be content to allow matters to drift along, accepting the testament, but feeling no need to actively promote it in the face of reluctant tribesmen and townspeople. Medoc must have convinced a large proportion of the college that monotheism will strengthen their influence - and also that the Roman threat is about to descend upon us."

Brioc shifted uncomfortably under her divided gaze, privately he had been uncomfortable with Medoc's manipulations of the brotherhood. He had felt it had a great deal of virtue, but nevertheless, there was more than a hint of impertinence in this reshaping of the worship of the ancient Gods. Lofting Lugh to pre-eminence over all others would surely lead to anger on the part of Gods who had been worshipped in equal measure for as long as men could remember? Brioc suspected that his archdruid was not as devout a worshipper as he would wish. Medoc sometimes appeared to be practicing politics rather than promoting a proper reverence for the pantheon of druidic Gods. It was only personal loyalty that led Brioc to follow the old Druid's lead - and a fervent hope that the latter had received celestial guidance.

"Well Brioc? When does Medoc predict the Roman's will land?" Gregory had grown used to his wife's sharper insight into other people's motives - and was ready to act upon it.

"It is as Lady Myrcal says, Lord. The college - not Medoc alone - expect the invasion in late summer. July in fact."

"Well it is not a surprise really, is it, Brioc? Nevertheless it is a confirmation that is valuable to us. You should have given me the information immediately you had it. Why didn't you?"

This was not the direction that the druid had expected matters to take when he had brought his news of The Man's pronouncements. Knowing Gregory's view of the Roman threat he had felt that no purpose would be served by disclosing the college's own view, now, Myrcal's insight had wrong footed him, "As you say Lord, matters are as you expected, there seemed no urgency to talk of the college's views of the immediate future."

His king leant forward, grey eyes direct and very piercing, "Brioc you are an old friend as well as Camelod's pontif maximus, butnever again will you censor information in this way. I lead this country, not alone, but with my councillors and if I do not have the immediate and comprehensive support of my councillors, my decisions are weakened. Regardless of how you might see the matter, I need every bit of relevant information, every supporting or opposing factor, to sharpen the accuracy of my decisions. Is that clear, Brioc?"

The druid bowed his head in acknowledgement, "Yes Lord."

Myrcal's insights were not limited in scope, she applied them to Gregory too. Much as he might deny it in public, Gregory often displayed brief flashes of unconscious autocracy that were obvious to others. She would not have been surprised if Brioc's response had been, "Yes Majesty."

The moment came and departed in a second or two and Gregory once more became a man who consulted and heeded advice, "Well, as we expected, the Romans will be here in the late summer. I think we need a meeting of the High Council, Myrcal.

"Brioc, will you please contact Lord Lucius, the legates and the secretaries - and ask them to meet here in two day's time?"

It was a polite dismissal and Brioc left on his errand with a distinct feeling of relief.

The meeting was fairly brief, stripped to its bones it amounted to a statement by Gregory and a designation of responsibilities for his council.

"Brioc tells me that the druidic college confirms our opinion that the Romans will invade the south east of Britain this year. In fact they state that it will be in July." The news may have been expected, but it still aroused a brief burst of discussion amongst the others at the table. Gregory let it run its course and then halted it with a gesture.

"Now it is the opinion of my General that they will have more than enough work to do in that part of the country for at least a year. There are about four months of campaigning weather before winter sets in, which will be enough we think to break the back of any organised resistance, but it will not defeat Caradoc - probably not Togodumnos either. They are both generals who have shown a great deal of tenacity since King Cunobal died; Caradoc in successfully expanding the Catuvelauni lands to the west and Togodumnos, less successfully, in assimilating part of the Iceni lands and containing their resistance. To be fair to Togodumnos I believe that the Iceni are a more warlike people than the Atrebates and that might explain why his brother seems the more competent warrior. However, the point is that we expect there to be a great deal of scattered fighting between the Romans and the Catuvelauni after the winter season is finished - and although the outcome is not in any doubt, we do not think that there is any possibility of Romans

encroaching on our territory next year. They will need the winter to consolidate their gains, push any resistance out to the far west and then assemble troops and materiel for marching further north.

"Some of you will remember that we originally accepted that they would take all the country up to the line of the Trent. That was when we built Cantodunon. Much has changed; we are more populous than we were then - and our army is stronger both in numbers and equipment. Neither Lord Lucius nor I can see any reason why we should accept the Trent as our boundary with the south east. We are unlikely at this stage to expel the Romans (our information is that there will be more than twenty thousand legionaries and a similar number of auxiliary cavalry, slingers and other specialists), but we are growing stronger here in our own land and they must bring in any reinforcements from Gaul. At added expense! I believe that they will expand to the western limits of the Dumnoni - we will probably lose our tin trade - and the eastern limits of the Iceni. All good, rich farming land and capable of supplying a large part of their constant need for corn.

"As you can see, we can confidently expect at least twelve months free of any need to engage Roman troops and I propose that we make use of that time to concentrate on training our own army. We have just over twenty thousand trained men comprising infantry, cavalry, light cavalry and mobile ballista batteries, but only twelve thousand of those men have more than a year's experience, eight thousand of them fit to fight veteran troops. Roman troops will have had at least five years experience of fighting along the frontier of the Rhine and Danube. We must spend the next year toughening up our own men, exercising them in the field - the Brigante should supply useful practice there - and perfecting our weaponry and its deployment. In particular the new heavy cavalry needs to be recruited, the heavy armour and weapons perfected and the men exercised with them. We will have a full cohort of the large horses broken to the saddle and hardened to battle by the end of this year, but horses need riders. The Romans have nothing like our heavy cavalry and there is no possibility of them developing such a force in the next five to ten years - I believe that just one cohort is capable of smashing the legion's front ranks. For all those reasons I have complete confidence that we can confine the invasion to the south and south east. Rome will get its corn from the Iceni, its tin from Duboni and, if they make any attempt to go further .. a bloody nose from Camelod.

"For the next year or so I see no threat to our towns and we can afford to spread the legions to the borders of our lands and make use of that space of time to become fully prepared.

"That is precisely what I am proposing now, the legates will deputise primuses of their choice to take command of Windubro and Cantodunon and the settlements on the Trent. I wish them to agree on another officer to take responsibility for the Severn and the land around the head waters of the Dove. That done, legate Caionac will take six thousand men into the lands north of the Dove and legate Dungan will take a similar force to the north of Pencalda. Apart from the need to provide seasoned officers, all those men will be chosen from recruits inducted in the last two years. Septimus Causta will have a roving brief between the two forces, carrying out officer training and conferring with the two commanders.

"I believe that this strategy will bring our forces up to a formidable state of readiness - and also bring us new recruits, citizens and agricultural land."

Leaning back in his chair he surveyed his councillors before saying, "This will mean more work for all of us, I'm afraid..... Huw. This is going to be an expensive time for us, what is your view of our ability to increase the output of the ironworks, boardmills and all our other enterprises?"

Huw rose from his chair, leaning forward over the table, uncoiling his lean body like a roll of pliable metal. His taciturn features, were well lined, but there was a hint of humour in the corner of the thin lipped mouth. "Lords," nodding to Gregory and Lucius, "Lady and friends. I don't really think that there will be a problem. Councillor Kierha will give her opinion on the accessibility of our markets shortly (and I already know what that is), so I will restrict myself to our actual production. The new iron foundry on the Dove is ready to start full production of cast iron. Now that means that we will increase our production of iron cauldrons, coulter blades and all the other products of the foundry by one eighth, but also, because of an experiment that Duor and I have been carrying out, we can cast steel."

Most of the councillors, with the possible exception of the legates, were aware of the difference between iron, cast iron and steel. The first was soft and malleable, the second harder, but very brittle and the last could be made both hard and soft, flexible and stiff. It held an edge much better than iron and did not shatter like cast iron - it was in fact used for making cutting edge weapons and tools, but it was a long laborious business producing it from raw iron and alloying it with the charcoal in the correct manner. Which was why items like coulter blades which did not need to be flexible as well as hard, were made from cast iron. Cast steel should be harder than cast iron and cheaper in terms of labour than steel made by carburisation and repeated forging..

The ironmaster smiled as the implications of his announcement registered on the faces of his audience, "We have found that pouring cast iron onto a crucible of soft iron and then placing it back in a furnace with additional fuel, gives us steel - in fact a variety of steels which we can test by pouring off small sample sticks and breaking with a hammer. It is a process that depends greatly on observation by the steel master and I think that we can retain the secret for a long time to come. And not any iron ore will do, we have to be selective. Not.." his hand lifted in admonition, "...that the metal replaces high quality steel, but we can make axe heads, chizels, adzes, cheap knives and short swords - and I dare say that other products will come to mind. Duor and I calculate that the process can be in production six or eight months from now. So far as our other products are concerned, there are no startling changes, but the corn fields of the new territories are promising well. If the rest of the year goes well and the harvest is good, we will have twice as much grain as last year - and the Romans are crying out for grain." He gave a rakish grin, "As long as they stay in this country we have a captive market. Strange, isn't it?" Huw sat down and made way for Kierha.

She began without any preamble, "The docks at Gesoriacum are overloaded with Roman transports as we expected, but the town authorities are succeeding in keeping most of them out of the way of merchant traders. I found it surprising to see how they had overridden the wishes of the admiral and governor, and directed most of the transports to inlets along the coast, north and south, but, of course, the city depends on trade and the presence of the transports has naturally increased the flow of goods by land and sea - so the city fathers are ensuring that there is no impediment to its flow ...and no impediment to the earning from it.. It is my opinion that we will be able to ship Huw's products without any problem at all. The only problem that I do see is that the emperor, like Caligula before him, is running short of silver and has lowered the silver content in the currency again. This makes for a great deal of difficulty because a diluted denarius looks very like an original and both are in circulation with Claudius's head on them. If we had our own mint and kept scrupulously to virgin silver, we would have a trading advantage that would be worth a premium of at least a tenth."

Gregory shook his head, "Not yet Kierha, not yet. We would have to buy the ore from abroad and import skilled diemakers and coiners. However, I agree it would definitely be worthwhile, if only because of the prestige it would give our trading and the confidence merchants would have in our traders."

"With your head on it, Lord." It was no flattery, Kierha genuinely felt that Gregory's head should designate their currency.

"Oh no. Lugh's head will appear."

"Pardon me, Lord," Brioc interrupted, "But Lugh's features must not be imitated by man. He is the supreme God and it would offend him if men were to presume in that manner."

"But surely Brioc, images of Lugh have been made">

"What is past is past Lord - and forgiven, for the people were ignorant. It must happen no more."

Gregory eyed the druid uncertainly for a few moments whilst he wondered if the man really believed what he had just said. Then he decided that it did not matter if he did or not. A matter of doctrine had just been stated and it was not to his purpose to deny it. Camelod was being built on the strength of the newly modified religion after all.

He realised that they were all regarding him strangely (although Myrcal's mouth twitched with a suppressed smile), "Is that the end of your report Kierha?"

"Yes, Lord. We have the Customs business well organised and sufficient officers to cope with the expanding trade through Brido."

"Brido? Is that in operation already?"

The big woman gave an expansive smile, "Oh yes, Lord. We've been trading out of the new docks there for two months - ever since the business with the Brigante. The docks are working very well and have a capacity of five or six ships a day. That is, we can turn a ship around in a day and accept another in its place, and deal with up to five altogether. You see, we don't have to wait on the tide, it's deep water."

"I didn't know that."

Kierha smiled and resumed her seat.

"Well councillors, unless any of you have a question, we're finished with our meeting." He looked around the table, but no-one showed any interest in raising questions. "Then I wish you good day, General Lucius, Legates Causta, Caionac, Dungan and I will meet in the war room tomorrow morning to finalise our dispositions in the two areas that we will be occupying."

Late June
Windubro.

The message was brought by horseman from Ratas and the breathless man was shown directly to Lucius's office.

"Judging from your face, you are not bearing good news, soldier. Get your breath back while I read this package."

Broad hands tore the seal off and unfolded the sheets of parchment. There were six, the first with the message, 'Caradoc is raiding to the south and has a host of about seventy thousand men. He is within twenty miles of Ratas and has sent a delegation to our headmen to advise the Coritani that he will require grain and meat - which he will pay for. They are also offering our older warriors the chance to join the host and sack Windubro. Your friend, Fingal.'

Lucius remembered Fingal as one of the old chieftain's sons - it must have been three years since he had contact with him. At least the contact had borne fruit, although the man was not one of his spy ring in the Coritani country. What had happened to that man anyway? Lucius grunted and picked through the other leaves of the message. They consisted of estimates of various bands of Caradoc's host and their position two days ago. It was not a pretty picture.

He rapidly bundled the leaves up again and said, "Take these down to the legate's office and have copies made and despatched by fast boat to Cantodunon. Have signals send 'Caradoc close to Ratas now and advancing on Windubro' and send primus Caroc up here immediately. Oh and have the alarm sounded for a full muster on the parade ground."

Flopping back in his chair he thumped the desk with his fist, "Blasted Caradoc! What the Hell is the man thinking of? The Romans on his doorstep and he comes charging up here. Why?"

The answer was clear if unpalatable, Caradoc's hatred for Windubro was greater than his fear of Rome or perhaps he did not really believe that the Romans were on the brink of committing their army to the channel crossing. Whatever the reason, the man had chosen a fine time to move north. Lucius had three thousand men actually in the fort and probably another two thousand that he could pull back from the headwaters of the Dove. Cantodunon could despatch another three thousand or so - they would probably get here

around the same time as Caradoc! There were not many options left to Camelod's general, if he opposed Caradoc with his own eight thousand, he could undoubtedly beat any who chose to fight, but Caradoc was wily, he knew. Almost certainly he would flow around the Camelodians, attack their settlements and Windubro (fat chance he had of taking that) - and wreak a great deal of damage, there was no value in it for the Catuvelauni, it was simply an outwelling of spleen on Caradoc's part - and with the Romans almost in his own backyard too.

"Caradoc! You bloody evil turd. Where in Hell do you keep your brain?"

By the time his officers arrived, Lucius had smashed two chairs and a window. The battle with the Catuvelauni was about to begin.

The End

Next:

INVASION!

Historical Note

Readers might like to compare the technological evolution of Camelod with the growth of Britain's industry in the 18th century otherwise it may seem that the nation's progress is far too fast.

In Camelod, Heron's early atmospheric steam engine that developed from his hot air machines and the piston pumps and valves of Alexandrian origin, operated for the first time as a drop forge in 33 AD, thirty six years later it had evolved into a steam engine with double acting cylinders. This required the invention of lathes, slides for the tools (instead of hand held tools), boring machines capable of producing cylindrical bores of precise dimensions and fine finish; suitable steels and cast irons, development of boilers that were capable of sustaining forty to fifty pounds per square inch of pressure, blown hearths to fire the boilers. These matters themselves were supported by a host of other inventions that made them possible, such as the blast furnace, blowing engines, the choice of fuels from 'hard' coal to coke and so on.

A complex picture and a remarkable achievement in just thirty three years! Too remarkable, perhaps?

In Britain, Smeaton's atmospheric engine had a crudely machined bore, but was two or three times more efficient than Newcomen's cast bore. This was 1772, in 1776 Watt invented the condenser for the atmospheric engine. This was a large engine built into a structure of bricks, stone and timber and its bore was quite rough with a rope wound piston to accommodate the lumps and hollows. The precision boring machine was invented the year before in 1775 and Watt's engine was improved greatly. All these engines simply stroked up and down and operated pumps - usually for mines. Double acting steam engines were invented in 1782

The first steam engine producing rotary motion appeared in 1785, it was double acting and operated with steam at forty pounds to the square inch. The steam boat with paddles (there are earlier steam boats than this in Britain and America but they used oars or 'ducks' feet) came along two years later in 1787 as did the first cast iron barge for inland waterways. The wool combing machine was invented in 1789, rolling mills were powered by steam in 1790. In 1794 the 'first' hot air balloon ascended in France. 1795 saw the first hydraulic press, metal piston rings in 1797, several side paddle boats in 1797, the lathe with metal slides and tool post in the same year.

Cayley flew in a heavier than air machine in 1799 (at least his coachman did) and the basis for aerodynamics was established by him (the Wright brothers gratefully acknowledged this after their own historic powered flight).

An industrial screw cutting lathe was in use in 1800 as was a fully 'portable' steam engine with a cast iron bed.

This was all achieved in twenty eight years!







16519555R00219

Printed in Great Britain
by Amazon

PROPERTY OF MERTHYR TYDFIL
PUBLIC LIBRARY



Laurie Penman is a mechanical engineer and inventor with a strong interest in history particularly Romano-British history. At a time when he was confined to hospital bed after having a couple of vertebrae fused he became interested in what might have been the result if history had been just a little bit different — and he started to write *Seeds of Empire* whilst lying

flat on his back with stern instructions not to move while the chips of bone in his spine became firmly cemented. It is not easy writing whilst supine and he only managed a hundred pages or so but when the ward dragon permitted him to get out of bed, writing became much faster. Over the years the first book grew and was joined by three and half more (the latest will appear next year (2016) we hope) and Laurie has watched the growth of *Camelot* and its North European empire with a great deal of pleasure. Many developments in technology gave *Camelot* the strength to resist the mighty Roman Empire and seemed at one time to be too fast to be credited but a little historical research showed that what took place over thirty three years in the fictional empire only took twenty eight in the real world of 1772 to 1800.

ISBN 9781517647438



9 781517 647438

KT-135-668

